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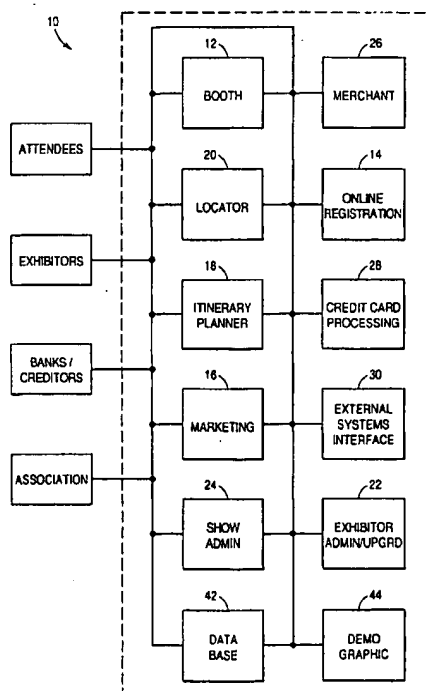
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(54) Title: INFORMATION AND COMMERCE SYSTEMS



(57) Abstract: An on-line tradeshow allows exhibitors to provide information on their products/services in virtual booths. The on-line tradeshow has locator functionality to allow attendees to obtain desired information on exhibitors or their products/services. Along with the virtual booths, the on-line tradeshow supports merchant functionality that allows exhibitors to transact business. In addition to placing orders for goods/services, the on-line tradeshow provides payment functionality for the purchasing

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of the goods/services. The on-line tradeshow provides assistance to the attendees, allowing them to register, to obtain itinerary information, and to obtain travel and local city information. The on-line tradeshow complements actual tradeshow and allows associations to offer additional value to their members. An outsource through telemarketing is able to recruit exhibitors to both the actual tradeshow and on-line tradeshow and can direct traffic to the on-line tradeshow.

INFORMATION AND COMMERCE SYSTEMS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to information and commerce systems and processes for those who wish to conduct, attend, exhibit or otherwise transact business on-line in the context of or in a virtual space that emulates, at least in some respects, trade shows, industry or professional society conferences or meetings, or other actual or virtual congregations of people who share some business or professional interest or characteristic.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Fairs, bazaars, and other trading centers developed for conducting commerce together with the development of civilization. With the growth of population and industry came increased specialization and the consequent development of commercial gatherings corresponding not to geography but to an industry or an industrial segment. Trade shows are a time-honored mechanism for conducting business. Exhibitors benefit by leveraging their brand and raising the profile of their products or services in the public or industry eye; creating and establishing personal and business connections with other exhibitors and attendees; shopping and selling; and otherwise exploiting the opportunity periodically to maintain their perceived position in the relevant industry. Attendees enjoy many of the same benefits, including establishing and maintaining personal relationships, keeping abreast of the market, and shopping. The trade show organization aims to benefit financially as well as to maintain its position, knowledge base and usefulness relative to the industry. In summary, regardless of the role of a particular participant, trade shows are about (1) establishing and maintaining personal and business relationships; (2) marketing and publicity; and (3) buying and selling. All of these activities benefit not only participants such as attendees and exhibitors, but they also strengthen and support information flow and the market generally; thus the trade show's long-standing social usefulness as a market mechanism.

In a similar way, professional society and association conferences and meetings benefit attendees, exhibitors, presenters and the industry generally. In perhaps a more

specialized way, such conferences benefit participants in many of the same ways trade shows benefit industry participants, helping them to establish and maintain personal and business relationships; market and publicize; and buy and sell in the context of their profession. In addition, professional society and association conferences usually accentuate information transfer and thus further the state of knowledge in a particular field to the benefit of presenters and their audiences. In any event, such conferences are comparable to trade shows to the extent exhibitors participate and, together with attendees and presenters, help build and sustain a market for various products and services associated with the relevant professional field. (For purposes of the present invention, trade shows, professional society or association conferences and/or other similar meetings are referred to as "shows.")

More currently, increased levels of connectivity and communication via the global information infrastructure ("GII") have made it possible for members of an industry or profession to communicate more easily and in a more distributed way. For example, the advent of hypertext transfer protocol ("HTTP"), a cross-platform messaging protocol which supports any number of computer and distribution standards, allows a cardiologist to send an E-Mail to a number of his or her colleagues simultaneously regarding a new development. In earlier days, that individual would have been required to create separate fax cover pages and engage in multiple telecopy transactions, each requiring a different long distance call, to disseminate the same information. A second-order effect is that the ease of such communications means more of them happen.

In a similar way, hypertext markup language ("HTML") enabled the world wide web, which allows virtually effortless transmission and presentation of information across various platforms, together with dissemination of graphical information in an open-standard way. Thus, graphical information from an entity's website may be accessed and generate a uniform presentation regardless of whether the user is operating an Apple or Sun computer with a Netscape browser or a Windows computer with an Explorer Browser.

Perhaps more importantly, however, as originally conceived by Vannevar Bush in the 1950s, HTML creates for the first time the possibility for a computer user freely to associate

and hyperlink from one location or document to another simply by selecting and invoking a web page address or "link." Such selection initiates a session with the addressed site which then virtually instantaneously provides to the user information referred to in the previous page. Again, the possibility and effortlessness of such free association enhances and radically alters the manner in which users create, access, and otherwise "think about" the information. As a result, the cardiologist can read a number of articles on-line at a first site, instantaneously communicate with colleagues or peers on any continent, hyperlink to an on-line book supplier to place an order for a book on the relevant subject, and then access and review various related product and services offerings via any number of search engines and business supported websites.

Recent manifestations of on-line activity relating to trade shows include sites which seek to create a virtual space that resembles, in limited ways, aspects of a trade show. Websites assist trade show operators and professional associations in extending their presence to the internet. Such sites make available on-line features such as:

- personalized attendee exhibitor lists
- personalized attendee maps
- search functions
- detailed information about each exhibitor including contact information with an E-Mail link and a list of products and descriptions
- maintenance and promotion of the look and feel of the site in accordance with the operator or association's image
- printout capability
- sponsorships and banners
- hosting and maintenance services.

These current approaches can be considered as outsourcing the trade show operator or professional association's task of establishing and maintaining its presence on-line in an effort to enhance its relationships with potential and actual attendees, exhibitors and other entities.

Another manifestation of enhanced communication, connectivity and transaction potential created by the internet is a variety of sites which provide a space for suppliers and buyers to locate trading partners, various products and services, and transact business in an industry, product or service-targeted way. Thus, a current site operates multiple "targeted communities of commerce" in multiple industrial sectors including chemicals, paintings and coatings, oil and gas, adhesives and sealants, health and safety and machine tools. In each community may be found current industry news, discussion forums, event calendars, newsletters, career centers, and links to various suppliers. A search engine supports users who wish to locate companies, products or services in such targeted communities.

The advent of extensible markup language ("XML") provides, for the first time, a "lingua franca" for cross platform data and financial information and metainformation transfer and thus for commercial transactions comparable to the way in which HTML supports presentation of information in a ubiquitous way, regardless of equipment, standards or protocols. Thus, financial information such as order processing or bill presentment and payment information may be stored or transformed into XML and communicated in a manner that allows transparent and seamless interaction with financial storage and processing systems of any third party. For instance, a particular business which supports its financial operation using a proprietary database can add a server which converts data into XML for transactions with any other entity which uses a similar XML server or stores its information in XML. The advent of such open-standard data interchange creates new and massive potential not only for sharing information, but also now for conducting financial transactions on the global information infrastructure, whether the internet, private extranets, private intranets, or other public or private networks of any kind. Among other things, it is now easier for an entity which builds or operates a website, such a site that emulates a trade show, to add electronic commerce functionality which allows the site to support sales of

product from hundreds or thousands of different companies, in a way that allows each of the companies to keep their space on the site fresh and updated with the latest product offerings (as they would control their own brand and image at a trade show), and in a way that allows the site to be in real-time communication with the financial engines of each of those companies in order to effectuate these sales.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The above-referenced developments and their convergence present a new opportunity with significant potential. For the first time, it is possible to establish on-line an industry or professional show presence that not only simulates an actual show, but, more importantly, creates and stimulates the sorts of economic and transaction activity that (1) emulate the sorts of commercial activity found at an actual show; (2) attract exhibitors and attendees to the virtual show because of economic opportunity presented there; (3) stimulate virtual attendance and virtual exhibition by individuals and businesses that may not otherwise participate in an actual show; (4) build and enhance commercial relationships in an entirely new, on-line way which supplements the relationships formed at a show in the context of a particular industry; and (5) build brand, industry strength and market not only by enhancing accessibility of information, but also by enhancing the ability to transact business on-line in the context of an industry or professional association.

According to the present invention, an information and commerce system makes available to the following an array of information and transaction opportunities in the context of a trade show or conference: (1) the industry or professional association or organization that owns or otherwise sponsors the show, and / or a third party show manager or other entity which manages, organizes and / or conducts the show for such an association or organization (herein sometimes collectively the "association"); (2) actual and virtual exhibitors; (3) actual and virtual attendees, and (4) third parties such as banks, creditors, shipping organizations, hospitality industry organizations and others whose products and services are related to or used by such shows and conferences. The information and commerce systems of the present invention make it possible, for the first time, for such entities not only to share information in

connection with a trade show or a virtual trade show, but also to transact business with each other in the context of the actual or virtual trade show, including in their roles as exhibitors or attendees.

Within the information and commerce systems of the present invention, a number of functionalities work together and independently to interact with exhibitors, attendees, the association, and other third party entities. Thus, on-line registration functionality cooperates with itinerary planning functionality, proposed city information services functionality, and mapping functionality to allow attendees and exhibitors to plan for an actual show or conference. Information or sales center functionality which the present invention makes available via the GII or otherwise (herein sometimes "virtual information center" or "booth" functionality) combined with locator functionality allows exhibitors to list relevant information about themselves, their products and services, together with key words and other metadata which allows attendees and other exhibitors to locate and communicate with them. (The word "virtual" for purposes of this document does not mean or imply that functionality is less real, does not actually exist or only exists in a lesser fashion or is not formally recognized or acknowledged; rather, virtual means that the functionality is available online, via the GII or any other electronic or communications networks, systems or devices, whether or not it is also available physically or "in person.")

In addition to these information-centric activities, the information and commerce systems according to the present invention make available a number of commercial transaction opportunities. First, virtual merchant functionality provides a space where actual or virtual exhibitors can not only disseminate information about their products and services, but also conduct on-line purchasing and payment transactions. Such virtual merchant functionality cooperates with external systems interface functionality, credit card processing functionality, presentment and payment functionality and other financial functionality to effectuate placement and processing of orders as well as payment and settlement of accounts and logistics arrangements such as for shipment, professional advice, import/export arrangements, tax services and other related services or assistance. Thus, exhibitors and attendees alike have a strong reason to visit the site repeatedly in order to do business with

reduced transaction costs, search costs and information overhead, and in a way that builds the industry and market by building and maintaining strong, information-rich commercial relationships within the industry.

Another example of economic activity supported by information and commerce systems according to the present invention is functionality which promotes recruiting of actual or on-line, virtual attendees and/or exhibitors either by the association, an organization that manages, produces and / or conducts shows for the association, or an organization to which the association has outsourced some or all of the responsibility of building and maintaining such an information and commerce system (such an organization is herein sometimes referred to as an "outsourcer"). Thus, systems according to the present invention can include storage and processing capability for conducting and tracking telemarketing, sales, bundling, target marketing via selected peer groups, and seeding with incentives for those whose participation is desired.

This new recruitment functionality and corresponding new economic potential creates a collateral advantage of information and commerce systems according to the present invention. For the first time, the association can outsource not only the creation and support of the virtual show or conference, an activity typically alien to its core competencies, but can outsource it so that the outsource assumes economic risk and reward in whatever desired manner and to whatever desired degree. For instance, the outsource can agree to build and maintain the virtual show at a discount or for free by assuming the risk of recruiting attendees and exhibitors and participating in the profits that accrue from the on-line economic activity attracted by the site. In this way, information and commerce systems according to the present invention provide rational incentives for success and growth in a continuing cycle. The show or association is incentivized to establish and maintain a strong virtual presence and to build brand at no risk to itself. The outsourcing entity is incentivized to create and maintain a best-of-breed on-line presence by participating in potential profits in a win-win risk/reward relationship. Attendees and exhibitors are incentivized to visit the virtual space repeatedly because it is the best space, virtual or physical, for locating trading partners and conducting transactions with least information overhead and lowest transaction

costs. In this way, on-line virtual shows created and sustained with incentives according to this invention leverage the present advantages of actual trade shows into the on-line world; attendees and exhibitors, buyers and sellers have found trade shows for years to be one of the most efficient and effective ways to find trading partners and transact commerce; now, they can do business in the same comfort on-line because of the commercial transaction potential afforded by functionality, processes and systems of the present invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and form a part of the specification, illustrate preferred embodiments of the present invention and, together with the description, disclose the principles of the invention. In the drawings:

Fig. 1 is a functional block diagram which shows internal and external relationships of certain functionality contained in an information and commerce system according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 2 is a functional block diagram of platforms on which the system of Fig. 1 may reside.

Fig. 3 is a functional block diagram which shows certain incentives and value propositions created using systems according to the present invention.

Fig. 4 is a functional block diagram showing a marketplace community partnership system according to the present invention.

Fig. 5 is a functional block diagram showing a marketplace community which may be created and sustained using systems according to the present invention.

Fig. 6 is a functional block diagram showing recruitment or customer acquisition processes which may occur using systems according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 7 shows process flow for selective seeding techniques in accordance with Fig. 6.

Fig. 8 shows process flow for massive seeding techniques in accordance with Fig. 6.

Fig. 9 shows process flow for targeted account and peer group sales techniques in accordance with Fig. 6.

Fig. 10 shows process flow for telemarketing processes in accordance with Fig. 6.

Fig. 11 shows process flow for conference or show sales in accordance with Fig. 6.

Fig. 12 shows process flow for bundling processes in accordance with Fig. 6.

Fig. 13 is a functional block diagram showing marketplace audience generation and retention processes which may occur according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 14 shows process flow for presence marketing processes in accordance with Fig. 13.

Fig. 15 shows process flow for association promotion processes in accordance with Fig. 13.

Fig. 16 shows process flow for trade publication advertising and public relations processes in accordance with Fig. 13.

Fig. 17 shows process flow for marketplace loyalty program processes in accordance with Fig. 13.

Fig. 18 is a functional block diagram showing industry specific programs to build and sustain a marketplace community according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 19 is a functional block diagram showing media and integration services according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 20 is a functional block diagram showing certain electronic information center or “booth” functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 21 shows process flow for certain electronic information center processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 22 is a functional block diagram showing certain electronic information center and related functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 23 is a functional block diagram showing certain electronic merchant functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 24 shows process flow for certain electronic merchant processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 25 shows process flow for certain electronic merchant order and policy processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 26 shows process flow for certain electronic merchant order management processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 27 shows process flow for certain electronic merchant buyer group management processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 28 shows process flow for certain electronic merchant shipping management processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 29 shows process flow for certain electronic merchant tax processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 30 shows process flow for certain electronic merchant financial settlement processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 31 shows process flow for certain electronic merchant accounting and inventory management processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 32 is a functional block diagram showing certain locator functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 33 shows process flow for certain locator processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 34 is a functional block diagram showing certain electronic commerce customer service functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 35 is a functional block diagram showing certain lead management functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 36 shows process flow for certain lead management processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 37 is a functional block diagram showing certain attendee data demographics functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 38 shows process flow for certain attendee data demographics processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 39 is a functional block diagram showing certain electronic commerce logistics functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 40 shows process flow for certain electronic commerce logistics processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 41 is a functional block diagram showing certain external systems interface functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 42 shows process flow for certain external systems interface processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 43 is a functional block diagram showing certain electronic commerce credit functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 44 shows process flow for certain electronic commerce credit processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 45 is a functional block diagram showing certain customer pricing functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 46 shows process flow for certain customer pricing processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 47 is a functional block diagram showing certain auction functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 48 shows process flow for certain auction processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 49 is a functional block diagram showing certain itinerary planning functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 50 shows process flow for certain itinerary planning processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 51 is a functional block diagram showing certain on-line registration functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 52 shows process flow for certain on-line registration processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 53 is a functional block diagram showing certain host city/travel functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 54 shows process flow for certain host city/travel processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Fig. 1 and 2 show, at high level, functionality and physical platforms or components of a preferred embodiment of information and commerce systems according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 1 schematically shows a system 10 according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention which may be connected or otherwise communicate with a number of entities. Such entities include (1) the association; (2) persons or entities in the position of an attendee at an association's actual show or who visit the association's on-line show in the position of or perspective of an attendee; and / or people who simply connect with or visit systems 10 according to the present invention for whatever reason (herein sometimes "attendees"); (3) persons or entities in the position of an exhibitor at an association's actual show or who visit the association's on-line show in the position of or perspective of an exhibitor (herein sometimes "exhibitors"); and (4) other third parties such as financial institutions, shippers, entities in the hospitality industry, professional services providers, and any other entity who has to do with actual or on-line shows.

Persons or entities in the position of an attendee, exhibitor, or any others who do not actually attend a show, but who do communicate with system 10 and thus the on-line show, can interact with the information and commerce resources of system 10 which replicate or emulate in many ways the climate, atmosphere, look and feel, and potential for information sharing, economic transactions, and relationship building offered by a show. (Herein, such replication or emulation is sometimes referred to as "in the context of a show.")

System 10 preferably seeks to provide attendees, exhibitors, associations and other parties an on-line destination, place or virtual space in the context of a show where they may build relationships, gather information, conduct business transactions, and otherwise conduct activities in the context of a show. System 10 incentivizes participation of such entities as discussed in the "Summary of the Invention" section above. Thus, it is important that such entities are incentivized to return to system 10 and transact business using it for their own economic benefit as well as the benefit of the industry, the association and the other entities.

Accordingly, the present invention not only provides information using system 10, but also creates a space where economic activity may occur.

Fig. 1 shows various pieces of functionality which enhance or assist the information flow and economic activity, transaction and commerce potential of system 10. Systems 10 according to the present invention can contain some or all of the functionalities shown in Fig. 1; they need not contain all such functionalities. In the particular system shown in Fig. 1, system 10 includes virtual information center functionality 12 which may be interconnected with other functionalities in system 10 including on-line registration functionality 14 and marketing functionality 16 which assists in recruiting attendees and exhibitors according to customer development processes according to the present invention. Functionality such as itinerary planner functionality 18 and locator functionality 20 assist attendees and exhibitors in planning for shows and finding each other in order to transact information or business. Exhibitor administration and upgrade functionality 22 assists in supporting and maintaining system 10 and marketing the benefits of participation in system 10 to exhibitors and potential exhibitors. Show administrative functionality 24 allows associations (including third party managers) to interact with system 10 in order to control and customize system 10 and the virtual space according to their responsibilities, objectives, preferences and desires.

Economic activity, business transaction and commerce potential of system 10 is enhanced with virtual merchant functionality 26 which may interact with credit card processing functionality 28 and external systems interface functionality 30 in order to allow exhibitors in the position of virtual merchants to offer their products or services for sale in the virtual space supported by system 10, so that orders may be taken, shipping and other logistics arranged and payment made and settled. (Credit card processing functionality 28 may include credit card gateway functionality as disclosed in that certain copending patent application sharing a filing date in the U.S. Patent Office with this document, entitled "Credit Card Gateway," and listing as inventors Russ Humphries and Stan Silvert, which application is incorporated herein by this reference.) Marketing functionality 16 allows the outsource to assume the responsibility of generating attendee and exhibitor participation in virtual information center functionality 12 and virtual merchant functionality 26 while sharing

potential of economic reward from such efforts. Such marketing not only increases participation in the context of the show and thus builds relationships in the industry to the benefit of all, but also economically benefits the outsource and/or the association that may participate in revenues generated by such economic activity. System 10 as shown in Fig. 1 thus allows a scenario in which the outsource can create and build participation on system 10 in the context of a show, where it assumes the economic risk and enjoys profit from the revenue stream of such economic activity, while the association benefits from additional exposure, publicity and brand awareness, and, possibly, economic participation as well. Furthermore, participation by the outsource in "ownership" of the system 10 and associated virtual show places proper incentive on the outsource to build and sustain the sort of space whose excellence and freshness in design, implementation and maintenance attracts and continues to attract maximum attendee and exhibitor participation and repeat participation to the benefit of all concerned.

Fig. 2 shows a high level hardware environment in which a preferred embodiment of system 10 according to the present invention may reside. As a preliminary matter, any or all of functionalities comprising system 10 may be implemented on or reside on one or more "computers," processors, platforms, networks or other systems. Various portions of the functionality of system 10 shown in Fig. 1 may, for example, be located in the same "box," in the same rack, or on different continents if desired. For instance, credit card processing functionality 28 may be found on an entirely separate platform 32 located in a city distant from the platform 32 on which other functionality in system 10 resides. As shown in Fig. 2, such platforms 32 can be connected to other entities and interconnected via the global information infrastructure, private networks, or in whatever manner desired.

Platform 32 comprises processor capacity 34, mass memory capacity 36 and input/output capacity 38. Thus, system 10 according to the present invention may occur in a platform specific environment, or according to any distributed or nondistributed architecture including client server, peer-to-peer, or other architecture supported by any desired circuit switched, packet-switched or other communications architecture.

According to a specific implementation of a preferred embodiment of the present invention, functionality of system 10 resides on a conventional Hewlett-Packard multi-processor Intel based web server supported with a Microsoft NT Server operating system. Data employed by the functionalities of system 10 in this implementation are maintained in a SQL server database which resides on the server. The server application is active server page - based. The server is connected to other entities on the worldwide web conventionally.

Fig. 3 is a functional block diagram which shows certain incentives and value propositions which can be created using systems 10 according to the present invention. The association as existing brand owner, as shown in block 310, partners with outsource shown in block 320 to the mutual benefit of both. The outsource assumes risk and can contribute financial, intellectual property, process, support, marketing, product, hosting/network and/or third party tools or partnerships forms of value. Rewards from such a partnership, which may be allocated appropriately, include long term annuity revenue streams which can be allocated as desired, benefits for the industry marketplace, a stronger existing brand and on-line or electronic commerce brand for the association, integration of physical and virtual branding, and enablement of electronic commerce, so-called "E-Business" and community fulfillment.

Fig. 4 shows how systems 10 and processes according to the present invention function to accomplish such results. Such systems 10 and processes provide opportunity, for the first time, for a virtual electronic commerce marketplace and on-line community in the context of a trade show as shown in block 410. Such a virtual space 410 offers the potential for audience and site visitor generation, technology enablement, customer service for marketplace consultants, industry specific programs, customer integration and media services, customer acquisition and investment incentives to build the market. The virtual space 410 not only enhances the cause of the association and show branding efforts and exposure, but also the cause of constituents such as attendees, buyers, readers and industry association members, together with sellers, advertisers and exhibitors who now have a new virtual marketplace in which to conduct business and build relationships. Results include enhanced association show, association and publication branding, a larger more active

customer base, increased profit from business operations as well as new electronic customer relationships.

Fig. 5 is a functional block diagram showing, from another perspective, aspects of marketplace communities which may be created and sustained using systems 10 and processes according to the present invention. Virtual merchant services as supported by virtual merchant functionality 26 allow various forms of product management and presentation including pricing support, presentation support and auction services. Order management functionality supports placement of new orders, order history, order status and shipping status functionality. Policy functionality supports pricing and other order policy rules which may be defined to apply to various buyer groups, as well as other terms such as shipping. Product policy functionality allows definition and implementation of rules on quantity, customization for a buyer group, and shipping terms. Locator functionality 20 allows users, which may include exhibitors and/or attendees, to locate exhibitors, merchants, products and services among other things.

Other functionality according to the present invention as shown in Fig. 5 allows creation and maintenance of a vital electronic marketplace. Such functionality includes: (1) community management which may include content and publishing support and community building tools; (2) accounting/inventory management which may include standard interfaces to management systems; processes for integration, and standard packages; (3) financial settlement functionality which may include standard interfaces and programs for interaction with financial partners; support of all transaction types including real time, credit, bill paying, and purchase order/invoice support; (4) shipping and logistics which may include standard interfaces and programs for partners as well as customizable, flexible shipping setup and fulfillment for merchants; and (5) tax systems which may include tax tables or connectivity with tax professional or management support.

Functionality for additional enhancement of the marketplace community as shown in Fig. 5 can include: (1) customer service/customer care functionality which in turn may include capacity to help respond to various service requests and status inquiries; (2) media

and marketing services such as on-line, print, broadcast, internal marketplace, industry customized, and creative design and production functionality; and (3) integration services functionality which can support corporate systems integrated to marketplace functions, consulting and planning services, infrastructure and network services, and software development services.

Fig. 6 is a functional block diagram showing various processes for recruiting attendees, exhibitors and other customers in order to build and sustain a marketplace community that may be implemented on systems 10 according to the present invention. Such processes include selective seeding processes 610, massive seeding processes 620, targeted account and peer group processes 630; telemarketing processes 650, show sales processes 660 and bundling processes 670. Any or all of these recruiting or marketing activities can be conducted by the association or the outsource or both, with risks and economic reward allocated as desired. For instance, the outsource may be charged with such recruitment and efforts and participate in a portion of the enrollment fees generated by attendees or exhibitors who respond positively.

Selective seeding processes 610 as shown in Fig. 6 can include incentives targeted to influential sellers and others which may include free support, frequent reporting and two way feedback, an account manager for special care or service, and payment based on sales or certain time periods.

Massive seeding processes 620 as shown in Fig. 6 can include capital investment from the outsource, new company funding from the outsource and the association in joint partnership, revenue sharing partnerships, incentives for certain levels of exhibitor participation, and use of the actual trade show to facilitate participation.

Targeted account and peer group processes 630 as shown in Fig. 6 can include targeting of key leaders by category, offering of certain incentives such as stock or percentage in revenues, and special categorization or treatment of accounts based on status or performance.

Telemarketing processes 650 as shown in Fig. 6 can include providing different or special terms for actual show exhibitors as opposed to nonexhibitors in order to accommodate the interests of the association and the outsource, as well as exhibitors; integration with timing and messaging functionality of system 10 or processes according to the present invention, use of seeding or other incentives to recruit attendees or exhibitors, use of "sense of loss/gain" from early recruitment, and incentives such as preferred positions in a search engine of the locator based on longevity or degree of participation in the program.

Show sales processes 660 as shown in Fig. 6 can be tied to a physical or actual trade show or conference booth or a sales process used in connection with the actual show or conference, and they can include actual trade show floor promotion of the association, nightly booth drops and/or room drops, show specials, and seminars on E-Business.

Bundling processes 670 according to Fig. 6 can include bundling of exhibitor participation with the exhibitor's commitment to a physical or actual booth at a tradeshow or conference, other show services, association membership, publication and advertising incentives and other incentives to stimulate a positive decision from potential attendees or exhibitors.

Fig. 7 shows process flow for certain selective seeding processes 610. As a first step in the process, which may be conducted by the outsource, the association or others, sellers or potential exhibitors are identified who, by way of participating, are good examples for others. As a next step, incentives are offered according to telemarketing processes 650, targeted account and peer group processes 640, or show sales processes 660. Then, after an initial time period, or when other conditions are satisfied, exhibitors or participants may be charged based on criteria such as a percentage of sales, a fixed fee, or a combination of both.

Fig. 8 shows process flow for massive seeding processes 620. As first steps, a new company may be formed with the outsource, the association, funding sources and perhaps others as partners, or revenue sharing agreements with the outsource or association may be used to fund the process. As a next step, the potential exhibitor list based on past performance is generated. Such exhibitors are the target of funded electronic commerce

customer services or special support and other massive seeding efforts including advertising, audience generation, loyalty programs, and other services or benefits. Processes for reaching such exhibitors include targeted account and peer group processes 640, telemarketing processes 650 and show sales processes 660. After an initial period or when certain criteria are met, exhibitors may be charged based on percentage of sales, fixed fee or a combination of both.

Fig. 9 shows process flow for target account and peer group sales processes 630. As a first step, early adopters and key influencers among each product category and company category are identified. The list is the subject of selective seeding processes 610 and/or massive seeding processes 620 as desired in order to offer early program incentives and benefits such as: (1) favored position in the locator search engine linked to initial and consecutive participation; (2) long term discounts on services and offerings such as electronic information center, electronic merchant and advertising; and/or (3) stock in a new venture formed with the association, outsource, a funding source and others as participants to administer the marketplace community. Such benefits can relate to services purchased or marketplace success, and it is possible for early participants to pay nothing for active participation, while critical mass is being generated. As a next step, peer groups of early program participants are targeted and offered incentives such as favored positions in the locator search engine or incentives based on the value of traffic and existing peers on-line. Participation by the peer groups can be publicized and otherwise leveraged by sending regular E-mails to potential attendees and exhibitors, as well as other customers to create awareness of the peer group activity, as well as such publicity and leveraging via telemarketing processes 650.

Fig. 10 shows process flow for telemarketing processes 650. As a first step, a target list is generated of potential exhibitors and attendees. The contact list is then confirmed and proper levels of authority are established; prior program participation is identified. In the next step, contact occurs via mail or on-line and then prospects are solicited to buy virtual information center, virtual merchant or virtual auction services, or other fee for service offerings. New participants such as attendees or exhibitors are enrolled, and the outcome is

assessed, scripts modified, and program effectiveness is measured to close the feedback loop. The telemarketing efforts may be combined with the other processes shown in Fig. 6 to create additional incentives and assist on recruiting.

Fig. 11 shows process flow for show sales processes 660. As a first step, a show sales plan is generated. The plan is then executed including setup of seller systems such as virtual information center, virtual merchant and virtual auction functionality, use of show sales booths, and a combination of processes as shown in Fig. 6 as desired. A post show telemarketing process 650 may occur. The show sales experience is assessed and compared to performance in other shows in order to revise the plan for the next show.

Fig. 12 shows process flow for bundling processes 670. As a first step, bundled packages are defined that offer combinations of incentives and increased sense of value. The bundled incentives are offered with an actual trade show booth, other show services, association membership, or with publication or advertisement programs. At an appropriate time, which may include a trial period, participants are recruited to enroll in a paying relationship via telemarketing processes 650 or as otherwise desired.

Fig. 13 shows a functional block diagram for building and sustaining the marketplace community implemented on systems 10 from another perspective according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. Such community can be built and sustained via: (1) presence marketing processes 1310; (2) association promotion processes 1320; (3) trade publication advertising and public relations services 1330; (4) marketplace loyalty processes 1340; (5) store loyalty processes 1350; and (6) community building processes 1360.

Fig. 14 shows process flow for presence marketing processes 1310. A trade show contract is signed and other steps taken as shown in order to generate show materials. The outsource or association communicates to attendees, exhibitors and others about the pending launch of the show on-line. Then, promotional campaigns are planned and launched at the actual trade show to increase awareness and enhance recruiting for participation in the on-line community. Various elements and processes are reusable across multiple industry sites in order to enhance the results over time.

Fig. 15 shows process flow for association promotion processes 1320. As a first step, current and best practice techniques are identified to create interest among the association membership. Association authorization is obtained and the plan executed. Results are evaluated and incorporated in further execution of the plan.

Fig. 16 shows process flow for trade publication advertising and public relations processes 1330. As a first step, top trade publications are identified and advertising is defined, tested and executed. At a desired time, public relations campaigns may be conducted using standard or other templates. Return on investment of such advertising and public relations activities is assessed, and the assessment is incorporated into further advertising and publicity efforts as desired.

Fig. 17 shows the process flow for marketplace loyalty processes 1340. A site visitor can earn points by visiting certain pages or site destinations, purchasing products, assisting in recruiting others, writing product reviews or other activities. Points may be accumulated by visitors, groups or companies and used as a basis to receive incentives such as marketplace premiums, third party premiums, or industry interaction benefits. Such potential premiums and benefits are shown in Fig. 17.

Fig. 18 is a functional block diagram which shows other techniques for building marketplace community which may be implemented on systems 10. Partnering programs 1810 can include revenue sharing, joint venturing, lead generation, customer acquisition arrangements among industry players, and participation with accounting, legal, tax, human resources or other professional providers, and import/export providers. Content programs 1820 can include revenue sharing, ad revenue sharing, portal system adoption and integration and/or personalized content. Marketplace distributor programs and processes 1830 may be designed to accelerate multiple key manufacturers or products into the community and to allow manufacturers to enter the electronic commerce world with minimum effort. Processes include on-line distributor organizations, on-line customer service, standardized shipping and commercial documents, distribution arrangements and other services which allow electronic

commerce with no or limited inventory. Ownership may be in the outsource, the association or partnerships as desired.

Fig. 19 is a functional block diagram showing certain media and integration service processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. Media services can be customized and targeted in various directions to support economic activity on systems 10 including virtual information center, virtual merchant, virtual auction and other activities. Such media services can be provided by the outsource in combination with exhibitors and/or the association as desired in any or all media formats to suit the marketplace community. Custom integration services can also support electronic commerce including E-Business plans, E-Business consulting, internet infrastructure planning and implementation, and application and system integration optimized for particular marketplace communities.

Fig. 20 is a high level virtual information center block diagram according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. A key value to the exhibitor is building web presence via brand and logo exposure. Ways in which virtual information center functionality contributes to that value include: supplying visitors exhibitor contact information and product brochures, providing a link to the exhibitor's site and/or feedback forms, surveys and demographics.

Process flow for virtual information center processes according to a preferred embodiment of the invention as seen by a user appears in Fig. 21. The user (whether attendee, exhibitor or otherwise) enters the flow by searching for a particular vendor by name, location, product category and, if desired, subcategory. Such search may be conducted using locator functionality 20. The use of a product category and subcategory allows users to search for products within an industry or trade show context and thus efficiently as opposed to an open ended search. In the next step, the user selects an exhibitor and then views selected exhibitor information and product. The user may then link to the exhibitor's site or supply a request for additional information, or otherwise communicate or interact with the exhibitor.

Fig. 22 is a functional block diagram showing cooperation of locator functionality 20 with virtual information center functionality 12 from a user's or visitor's point of view. Visitors enter the site and contact the locator search engine. Based on product category and/or subcategory entered by the visitor, the visitor is connected to one or more virtual information centers. Virtual information center functionality 12 may include or be connected to sales center functionality 2210, custom media and integration functionality 2220, information center functionality 2230, customer care functionality 2240 and/or customer service center 2250. Company administrative functionality 2260 allows the virtual information center exhibitor to create presentations and alter functionality as desired and according to the image they seek to project and results they hope to obtain. The virtual information center functionality 12 thus helps builds relationships and promote information proliferation and commerce in the marketplace community using system 10.

Fig. 23 is a high level functional block diagram showing operation of one version of virtual merchant functionality 26 according to a preferred embodiment of the invention. A particular exhibitor in the position of a merchant may have a product catalog 2310. The product catalog may interact with buyer group data for negotiated pricing functionality 2320 and product and order policies 2330 which may be defined by the merchant. Product catalog 2310 also interacts with shopping cart functionality 2340 which in turn may cooperate with real time credit, settlement, presentment or payment functionality 2350 which may be wholly or partially coextensive with credit card processing functionality 28 and external systems interface functionality 30 as shown in Fig. 1. The product catalog 2310 may be accessed by locator functionality 20. Shopping cart functionality 2340 interacts with order processing functionality 2360 to log, report and otherwise assist in or effectuate processing of orders. Logistics functionality and other functionality may cooperate with any of these components to effectuate shipping or other logistics requirements.

Fig. 24 shows process flow from the buyer's point of view for certain virtual merchant processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. As a first step, buyer searches for a vendor using locator functionality 20 according to vendor identification, product category and/or subcategory queries and/or possibly by price or other

standard product attributes (such as availability). A vendor is selected and the buyer logs in on the vendor's virtual merchant functionality. The buyer shops and can see a presentation that may include customized pricing, unique terms and conditions, financial links and shipping preferences among other personalized features customized to the particular user or buyer or a group in which he, she or it falls. The buyer orders items and then may check out according to the process flow. The buyer can also be presented with and can review purchase history and other historical data regarding past activity in the particular virtual merchant space, within a particular marketplace, or across multiple marketplaces.

Fig. 25 shows process flow for certain virtual merchant order and product functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. From an exhibitor's point of view, the exhibitor logs in and views a list of existing policies which it may change as desired. The exhibitor is also permitted to define a minimum and a maximum quantity for individual products or dollar values for entire orders, as well as any other desired order and product rules. The exhibitor is further allowed to define the number of increments allowed for a quantity purchase in addition to other policy definitions.

From the buyer's point of view, log in may be optional for the buyer to view the catalog and select items. If policy criteria are not met, the order is not accepted and the buyer may be returned to the catalog. If the criteria are met, and the order is successfully entered and processed according to rules defined by the exhibitor, and the buyer checks out.

Fig. 26 shows process flow for order management processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. From an exhibitor's point of view, the exhibitor logs in and reviews the order log. The log may be queried by date, status, customer name or other criteria. The exhibitor may then process orders and note the status of orders, whether filled, canceled, backordered, billed, and/or paid or a combination of the above. This order fulfillment process may occur automatically by a pass through to a fulfillment service. From the buyer's point of view, the buyer places orders which then affects the order log for management, manual or automatic, by the exhibitor.

Fig. 27 shows process flow for virtual merchant buyer group processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. From an exhibitor's point of view, the exhibitor logs in and is permitted to create or define groups of one or more buyers. Such groups may be correlated to a product or products and certain quantity, price, value pricing and other criteria defined and correlated. The exhibitor may also define buyer group characteristics and one-to-one pricing information. From the buyer's point of view, the buyer sees a catalog which displays a different price depending upon the buyer group containing the buyer. The buyer selects products, completes an order and checks out. The price and other order fulfillment criteria are invoked according to the rules set by the exhibitor.

Fig. 28 shows process flow for virtual merchant shipping management processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. From an exhibitor's point of view, the exhibitor is permitted to create shipping methods using flat price models or tiered models based on quantity or weight, or other characteristics, including selecting from pre-integrated shipping systems, data and processes or other logistics or desired options. The exhibitor can assign destinations, whether domestic or international, that apply for selected shipping methods. The exhibitor can also define product exceptions from these rules as well as other shipping or handling definitions. From the buyer's point of view, the buyer selects items and enters the ordering and payment process. The buyer selects a shipping destination and virtual merchant functionality 20 determines applicable shipping models according to the rules the exhibitor has defined and choices by the buyer if permitted. The virtual merchant functionality 20 generates the shipping list based on the rules defined by the exhibitor and the checkout process is completed.

Fig. 29 shows process flow for certain virtual merchant-tax system processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. From the exhibitor's point of view, the exhibitor may view current tax law information that is relevant and enable or disable tax for orders placed. Tax rates may be based on or set by external trusted sources. From the buyer's point of view, once an item is ordered, virtual merchant functionality 20 determines whether tax is to be added and computes applicable tax.

Fig. 30 shows process flow for certain virtual merchant financial settlement processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. From the exhibitor's point of view, the exhibitor is permitted to select payment methods to support, whether by credit card, check, purchase order, bill, electronic bill presentment or payment or other mode. From the buyer's point of view, once the buyer has selected items to order, the buyer then selects from authorized payment methods. Virtual merchant functionality 26 then interacts with credit card processing functionality 28, external systems interface 30, and/or other financial functionality corresponding to the payment methods selected by the exhibitor, in order to effectuate payment.

Fig. 31 shows process flow for virtual merchant accounting and inventory management processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. From the exhibitor's point of view, the exhibitor selects modules or has them generated, in XML format or otherwise, to interface to the exhibitor's in-house accounting system. From the buyer's point of view, once the buyer places an order, the order is transmitted to the exhibitor's accounting system via XML or as otherwise desired which then arranges and handles billing and payment as well as inventory level management and reordering. The functionality could include capacity that allows a buyer to check inventory availability; similarly, the locator functionality 20 by accessing this functionality could show inventory availability as part of the search results.

Fig. 32 is a functional block diagram showing locator 24 operation according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. An exhibitor database which may be in XML format or otherwise can be fed by data sources that include data relating to exhibitor names, exhibitor locations and/or exhibitor product classifications, as well as other data or information. The database 3210 may promulgate search results to the virtual information center functionality 12, virtual merchant functionality 26 and other functionality as desired for various purposes. Such purposes may include click stream monitoring and tracking which can interface with demographic functionality, be utilized to create marketing strategies, enable real-time cross selling or support personalization functions for exhibitor systems.

Fig. 33 shows process flow for locator functionality 20, from a buyer's point of view. In the first step, the buyer searches according to exhibitor identification information or product category and/or subcategory criteria. The buyer views the search results and selects exhibitors or is linked directly to relevant pages corresponding to an exhibitor, whether on the exhibitor's site or within system 10. If the buyer goes to exhibitor information in virtual information center functionality 12 or virtual merchant functionality 26, the buyer then purchases product, completes a feedback form or otherwise interacts with the functionality.

Fig. 34 is a functional block diagram showing operation of certain electronic commerce customer service processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. Once a potential exhibitor is recruited as a virtual information center or virtual merchant space owner or lessor, an electronic commerce customer service representative then follows up with initial greeting and sends a package of materials. The materials can indicate that the exhibitors can build their own site or a site can be prepared by the outsource. In a follow-up call, the outsource determines who will build the space. Either the outsource or the exhibitor can build and/or support the space. Information is added to locator functionality 20 in order to reflect information on the exhibitor's space.

Fig. 35 is a functional block diagram showing operation of certain lead management processes according to the present invention. Virtual information center functionality 12 can include feedback functionality 3510 which cooperates with a customer or attendee database 3520, which can form part of or otherwise be interfaced to database 42. That database 3520 can supply or support call reminders, a call history, lead status reports and other tracking information. Such information may be used by those who employ marketing functionality 16 or otherwise recruit attendees and/or exhibitors or seek to build or sustain the marketplace community.

Fig. 36 shows process flow for lead management processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. A visitor completes a feedback form which generates a lead record in the customer database 3520. Initial and/or subsequent calls are made or other marketing activities conducted and status and history tracked as desired. The aim of

increasing attendee and exhibitor participation is carried out in the follow-on steps shown in the flow diagram.

Fig. 37 shows a functional block diagram for data demographics functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. Attendees visit virtual information center functionality 12, virtual merchant functionality 20 or other space on system 10. A database is maintained of visits, products viewed, products bought (according to category, subcategory or otherwise), visitor identification information and any other information desired to be tracked. Reports may be prepared and promulgated or data forwarded for purposes of marketplace community building as discussed above and/or exhibitor, advertiser, association, outsource and/or other parties' use. The data may also be used to affect real-time systems or processes, including cross-selling or up-selling features and company to company sales programs which may be focused on segments, specific buyer groups or named individuals.

Fig. 38 shows process flow for data demographics processes according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. An user or attendee logs in and enters identification information. This system tracks the activities of the user or attendee and records data corresponding to activities of the user or attendee in the virtual information center space 12, virtual merchant space 20 or otherwise. The data is then used or promulgated as desired.

Fig. 39 is a functional block diagram showing electronic commerce logistics functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. The virtual merchant functionality 20 includes or cooperates with order information functionality 3910. The order information functionality 3910 in turn cooperates with bill of materials functionality 3920, shipping service functionality 3930, external systems interface functionality 30 and/or inventory management database 3940 in order to manage shipping, handling and/or inventory management as desired.

Fig. 40 shows process flow for certain logistics processes in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention. Once an order is placed via virtual merchant functionality 20, inventory is checked and a bill of materials is generated. Electronic product

may be immediately downloaded once payment has occurred, or physical goods may be packed and shipped once payment has occurred via exhibitor in-house fulfillment or third party fulfillment, then shipped according to order instructions. Inventory is then updated.

Fig. 41 is a functional block diagram showing certain external systems interface functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. That functionality may occur wholly or in part in external systems interface 30 as shown in Fig. 1. Virtual merchant functionality 20 cooperates with order information functionality 3910 which generates transaction records which are in turn supplied to the accounting functionality. The process flow is shown in Fig. 42 where an order is fulfilled after purchase and payment and a transaction record is generated. The accounting functionality supplies information to the vendor for use as desired.

Fig. 43 is a functional block diagram showing certain electronic commerce credit functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. A user may apply for credit on-line (including commercial credit, asset-based credit or virtual factoring) which if approved by a financial lending institution or credit entity alters records in a credit database against which orders may be processed. The process flow is shown in Fig. 44, where a financial entity reviews the buyer's credit application and the database is altered to allow payment on credit. (Credit applications may be bid to multiple financial institutions or handled by a single credit facilitator.) When such purchase occurs, virtual merchant functionality 20 authenticates buyer at a proper security level (if not already verified at log-in) and verifies credit and approves the purchase and the buyer's account information in the database is altered to reflect the payment.

Fig. 45 is a functional block diagram showing certain customer pricing functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. The product catalog 2310 of a particular merchant in a virtual merchant space may allow the merchant to define certain rules to define buyer groups and other rules to alter pricing based on various criteria. The product catalog 2310 can then support various negotiated or criteria based transactions, according to particular rules applied to particular buyers as to pricing, logistics and

otherwise. Fig. 46 shows process flow in which virtual merchant functionality 20 looks up rules to be applied to the buyer, displays appropriate information reflecting the rules and allows the order to be completed based on those rules.

Fig. 47 is a functional block diagram which shows certain auction functionality according to preferred embodiment of the present invention. Exhibitors transact with an auction database 4710 according to predetermined rules in order to list items and participate in and/or control the auction process. Bidders participate in the auction on-line and ultimately a sale occurs. Sales may be processed using credit card processing functionality 28, external systems interface functionality 30, or supplying order information to vendors in XML format or otherwise for fulfillment and payment. Process flow is shown in Fig. 48 for some steps in the process.

Fig. 49 is a functional block diagram showing itinerary planning functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. A situs database 4910 can contain information about show schedules, floor plan of exhibitor locations, a listing of hotels, city attractions and other information. The user can interact with database 4910 and copy information into his or her calendar-based or other-based itinerary (which may be implemented in itinerary planner functionality 18 shown in Fig. 1. The itinerary so created can be stored or downloaded, printed out or otherwise employed by the user or attendee. A process flow is shown in Fig. 50 where the attendee views a conference schedule and other information and adds the information to his or her itinerary. The itinerary is downloaded, stored, printed or otherwise transformed into usable medium and format.

Fig. 51 is a functional block diagram showing on-line registration functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. A registration database may be built and maintained based on registration forms completed by attendees or exhibitors. Real time credit card authorization information can be stored in the database. Information may be supplied to the registration database 5110 based on the association's list of facts, mailed, or phoned-in registration information, or from a real time registration system such as those found at trade shows. The registration database 5110 can be a basic building block for

data and information maintained in system 10 because it can form a core list of attendees and exhibitors and information about them. It can therefore interact with any or all of the functionalities shown in Fig. 1 or otherwise contained in the system. It can serve as a basis for on-line community marketplace building, electronic transactions on using virtual merchant functionality 26, information exchanged using virtual information center functionality 12, locator functionality 20 and other functionality. Database 5110 can form part of or cooperate with on-line registration functionality 14 as shown in Fig. 1.

Fig. 52 shows registration process flow for attendees according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. The attendee completes a registration form and, if desired, submits credit card information. The attendee can receive confirmation by E-Mail when a record is created or altered in the database 5110. Use may be made of the information as desired to carry out any of the purposes or achieve any of the results of the present invention.

Fig. 53 is a functional block diagram showing certain host city/travel functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. A host city/travel database 5310 can contain information about city attractions, travel services, hotels and other similar information. Such information can be made available to attendees, exhibitors or others using system 10, including being imported into itineraries using itinerary planner functionality 18, or otherwise used as desired for planning or other purposes. Fig. 54 shows process flow in which an attendee uses relevant information, notes or copies as desired, and/or enters it into his or her itinerary as desired. The user can also link to travel services or arrange for them using system 10.

All of database functionalities mentioned above may be contained in a single relational or other database which may be stored on platform 32 in whole or in part. Separate databases need not be maintained for, as an example, auction database 4710, situs information 4910, registration information 5110, host city information 5310 or other information stored or database capacity or functionality mentioned above. In a preferred embodiment, the database is maintained in XML format to enable ready interaction with

other entities on the internet and for the various other advantages offered using extensible markup language.

The foregoing description of the preferred embodiments of the invention has been presented only for the purpose of illustration and description and is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise forms disclosed. Many modifications and variations are possible in light of the above teaching.

The embodiments were chosen and described in order to explain the principles of the invention and their practical application so as to enable others skilled in the art to utilize the invention and various embodiments and with various modifications as are suited to the particular use contemplated.

CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A method of providing an on-line tradeshow for an association, comprising:

establishing virtual booths for the on-line tradeshow;

providing the virtual booths to exhibitors so that the exhibitors can provide exhibitor information in their respective virtual booths;

allowing attendees to visit the virtual booths on-line and obtain the exhibitor information;

providing merchant functionality linked to the on-line tradeshow; and

allowing entities to transact business through the merchant functionality.
2. The method as set forth in claim 1, wherein the allowing entities to transact business comprises allowing the entities to place orders with at least some of the exhibitors.
3. The method as set forth in claim 1, wherein the providing of the merchant functionality comprises allowing the exhibitors to accept orders placed through the on-line tradeshow.
4. The method as set forth in claim 1, further comprising effectuating, through the on-line tradeshow, payment for the sales that occurred through the merchant functionality.
5. The method as set forth in claim 4, further comprising coordinating, through the on-line tradeshow, shipping for the sales that occurred through the on-line tradeshow.
6. The method as set forth in claim 1, further comprising using an outsource to recruit at least one of the exhibitors or the attendees to the on-line tradeshow.

7. The method as set forth in claim 1, further comprising, through the on-line tradeshow, assisting attendees in attending an actual tradeshow for the association.

8. The method as set forth in claim 1, further comprising providing locator functionality on the on-line tradeshow so that attendees can search for desired information located in the on-line tradeshow.

9. The method as set forth in claim 8, wherein the locator functionality allows attendees to search for desired exhibitors.

10. The method as set forth in claim 8, wherein the locator functionality allows attendees to search for desired exhibitor information.

11. The method as set forth in claim 1, further comprising tracking demographics data associated with activity that occurs through the on-line tradeshow.

12. The method as set forth in claim 11, wherein the demographics data comprises data associated with activity of the attendees on the on-line tradeshow.

13. The method as set forth in claim 11, wherein the demographics data comprises data associated with business transacted through the merchant functionality.

14. The method as set forth in claim 1, further comprising providing seeding to at least one of the exhibitors or attendees to encourage use of the on-line tradeshow.

15. The method as set forth in claim 1, further comprising conducting an auction through the on-line tradeshow.

16. A method of providing services for an on-line tradeshow for an association in conjunction with an actual tradeshow, comprising:

providing the on-line tradeshow to the benefit of the association, the on-line tradeshow having:

virtual booths so that the exhibitors can provide exhibitor information in their respective virtual booths; and

attendee functionality providing assistance to attendees in attending the actual tradeshow; and

enlisting services of an outsource, the outsource employing telemarketing to recruit exhibitors for the on-line tradeshow.

17. The method as set forth in claim 16, further comprising providing technical support to exhibitors in establishing the virtual booths.

18. The method as set forth in claim 16, wherein the outsource further recruits attendees to the on-line tradeshow.

19. The method as set forth in claim 16, wherein the providing of the on-line tradeshow further comprises providing merchant functionality for allowing exhibitors to transact business through the on-line tradeshow.

20. A method of providing an on-line tradeshow for an association, comprising:

establishing virtual booths for the on-line tradeshow;

providing the virtual booths to exhibitors so that the exhibitors can provide exhibitor information in their respective virtual booths;

allowing attendees to visit the virtual booths on-line and obtain the exhibitor information;

providing locator functionality for permitting attendees of the on-line tradeshow to search for and obtain desired exhibitor information; and

providing merchant functionality for allowing exhibitors to transact business through the on-line tradeshow.

21. The method as set forth in claim 20, wherein the providing of the locator functionality comprises tagging exhibitor information in XML.

22. The method as set forth in claim 20, further comprising order placement functionality for allowing orders to be placed with exhibitors through the on-line tradeshow.

23. The method as set forth in claim 20, further comprising order placement functionality for allowing exhibitors to accept orders through the on-line tradeshow.

24. The method as set forth in claim 21, further comprising payment processing functionality for effectuating payments placed through the order placement functionality.

25. An automated system for marketing products and services in the context of a tradeshow, comprising:

a. tradeshow association memory adapted to present a plurality of interfaces to assist users in (x) accessing information about a tradeshow including exhibitor information about exhibitors at the tradeshow, (y) registering as an attendee at said tradeshow using the automated system and (z) registering as an exhibitor at said tradeshow;

b. merchant memory adapted to store merchant information about a plurality of merchants, at least some of which are exhibitors at said tradeshow, the merchant information for each merchant including merchant identification information, merchant product/service information and merchant product/service price information;

c. product/service locator functionality adapted to permit a user to access at least part of merchant information based on user product/service identification information input by the user; and

d. order placement functionality adapted to permit a user to place an order for products or services identified in said product/service identification information.

26. The system as set forth in claim 25, further comprising payment processing functionality which is adapted to cooperate with said order placement functionality to receive

user payment information from a user corresponding to an order placed by said user interacting with said order placement functionality.

27. The system as set forth in claim 26, wherein the payment processing functionality includes credit card transaction functionality adapted to receive user credit card information, interact with at least one credit facility and enable payment based on having interacted with said credit facility.

28. The system as set forth in claim 26, wherein the payment processing functionality includes electronic presentment and payment functionality adapted to receive user payment information, interact with at least one external facility, and enable payment based on having interacted with said external facility.

29. The system as set forth in claim 25, further comprising order information transmission functionality adapted to inform merchants information about orders for their products/services.

30. The system as set forth in claim 25, wherein at least some of said product/service identification information includes product/service characteristic information and said product/service locator functionality is adapted to permit a user to access at least part of merchant information based on said product/service characteristic information.

31. The system as set forth in claim 30, wherein said product/service locator functionality is adapted to permit a user to access at least part of merchant information based on two levels of said product/service characteristic information.

32. The system as set forth in claim 25, further comprising marketing functionality adapted to assist in recruiting businesses to list merchant product/service information on said system.

33. The system as set forth in claim 25, wherein the product/service locator functionality is adapted to assist the user in locating business entities having desired characteristics.

34. An automated system for recruiting online exhibitors and displaying their products and services in the context of a tradeshow, comprising:

a. tradeshow association memory adapted to present a plurality of interfaces to assist users in (x) accessing information about a tradeshow including exhibitor information about exhibitors at the tradeshow, (y) registering as an attendee at said tradeshow using the automated system and (z) registering as an exhibitor at said tradeshow;

b. online exhibitor memory adapted to store online exhibitor information about a plurality of online exhibitors, at least some of which are exhibitors at said tradeshow, the online exhibitor information for each online exhibitor including online exhibitor identification information and online exhibitor product/service information;

c. locator functionality adapted to permit a user to access at least part of online exhibitor information based on a query by the user; and

d. online exhibitor marketing functionality adapted to assist in recruiting online exhibitors, the marketing functionality including memory which is adapted to track which entities have registered and paid a registration fee as online exhibitors.

35. The system as set forth in claim 34, further comprising online exhibitor display functionality which presents for users at least some of online exhibitor information.

36. The system as set forth in claim 34, wherein the online exhibitor display functionality is adapted to present, for at least some of the online exhibitors, a link to their websites.

37. The system as set forth in claim 34, further comprising demographic functionality adapted to assist in providing online exhibitors with information about users who access any of said online exhibitors' online exhibitor information.

38. The system as set forth in claim 34, wherein at least some of said online exhibitor information includes online exhibitor characteristic information and said locator

functionality is adapted to permit a user to access at least part of online exhibitor information based on said online exhibitor characteristic information.

39. The system as set forth in claim 38, wherein the locator functionality is adapted to permit a user to access at least part of online exhibitor information based on two levels of said online exhibitor characteristic information.

40. An automated system for accommodating actual exhibitors and online exhibitors and for marketing products and services in the context of a tradeshow, comprising:

a. tradeshow association memory adapted to present a plurality of interfaces to assist users in (x) accessing information about a tradeshow including exhibitor information about said exhibitors, (y) registering as an attendee at said tradeshow using the automated system and (z) registering as an exhibitor at said tradeshow;

b. merchant memory adapted to store merchant information about a plurality of merchants, at least some of which are online exhibitors, the merchant information for each merchant including merchant identification information, merchant product/service information and merchant product/service price information;

c. online exhibitor memory adapted to store online exhibitor information about a plurality of online exhibitors, at least some of which are actual exhibitors at said tradeshow, the online exhibitor information for each online exhibitor including online exhibitor identification information and online exhibitor product/service information;

d. locator functionality adapted to permit a user to access (x) at least part of online exhibitor information based on a query by the user and (y) at least part of merchant information based on user product/service identification information input by the user;

e. online exhibitor marketing functionality adapted to assist in recruiting online exhibitors, the marketing functionality including memory which is adapted to track which entities have registered and paid a registration fee as online exhibitors; and

f. order placement functionality adapted to permit a user to place an order for products or services identified in said product/service identification information.

41. The system as set forth in claim 40, further comprising payment processing functionality which is adapted to cooperate with said order placement functionality to receive user payment information from a user corresponding to an order placed by said user interacting with said order placement functionality.

42. The system as set forth in claim 41, wherein the payment processing functionality includes credit card transaction functionality adapted to receive user credit card information, interact with at least one credit facility and enable payment based on having interacted with said credit facility.

43. The system as set forth in claim 41, wherein the payment processing functionality includes electronic presentment and payment functionality adapted to receive user payment information, interact with at least one external facility, and enable payment based on having interacted with said external facility.

44. The system as set forth in claim 40, further comprising order information transmission functionality adapted to inform merchants information about orders for their products/services.

45. The system as set forth in claim 40, wherein at least some of said product/service identification information includes product/service characteristic information and said product/service locator functionality is adapted to permit a user to access at least part of merchant information based on said product/service characteristic information.

46. The system as set forth in claim 45, wherein the product/service locator functionality is adapted to permit a user to access at least part of merchant information based on two levels of said product/service characteristic information.

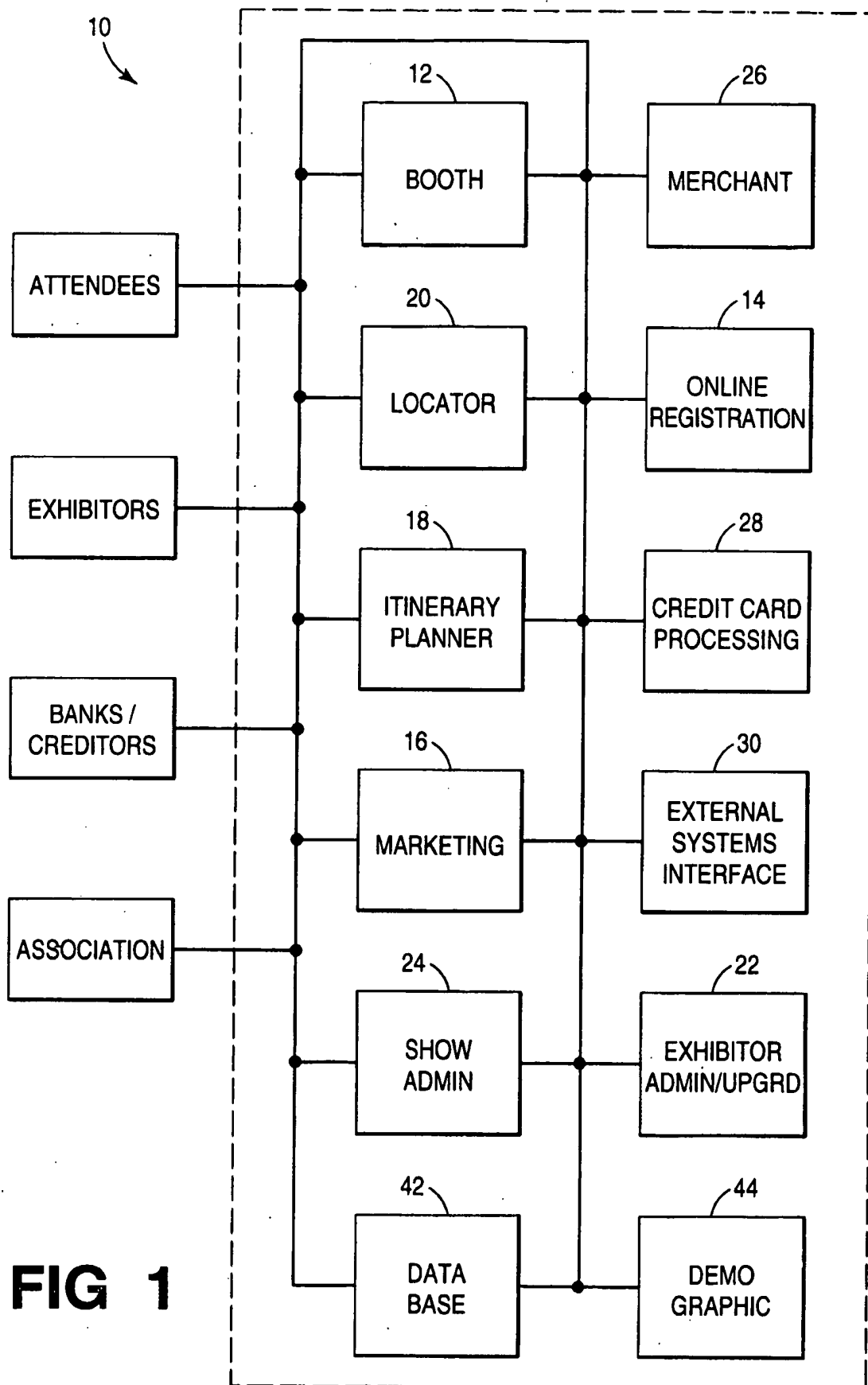
47. The system as set forth in claim 40, further comprising online exhibitor display functionality which presents for users at least some of online exhibitor information, including a link to the website of at least one exhibitor.

48. The system as set forth in claim 40, further comprising demographic functionality adapted to assist in providing online exhibitors with information about users who access any of said online exhibitors' online exhibitor information.

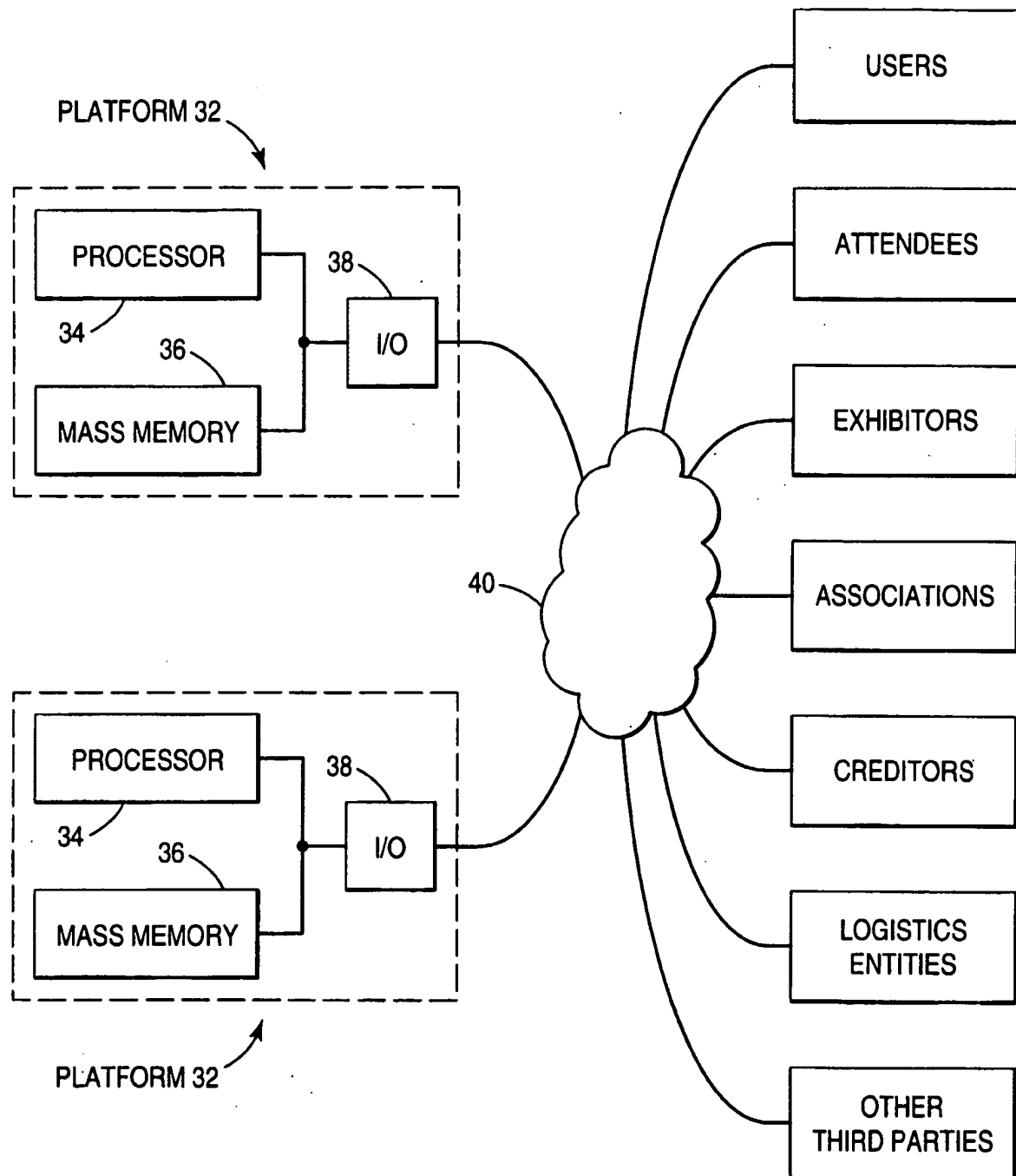
49. The system as set forth in claim 40, wherein at least some of said online exhibitor information includes online exhibitor characteristic information and said locator functionality is adapted to permit a user to access at least part of online exhibitor information based on said online exhibitor characteristic information.

50. The system as set forth in claim 49, wherein the locator functionality is adapted to permit a user to access at least part of online exhibitor information based on two levels of said online exhibitor characteristic information.

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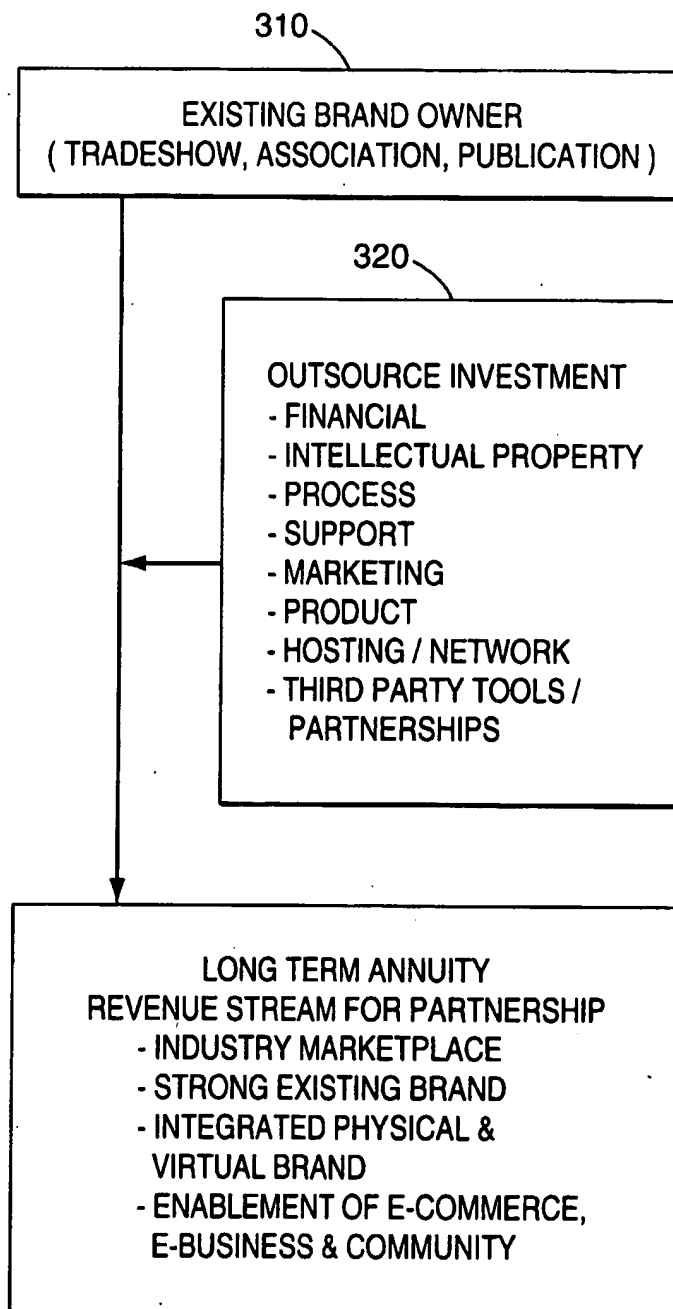


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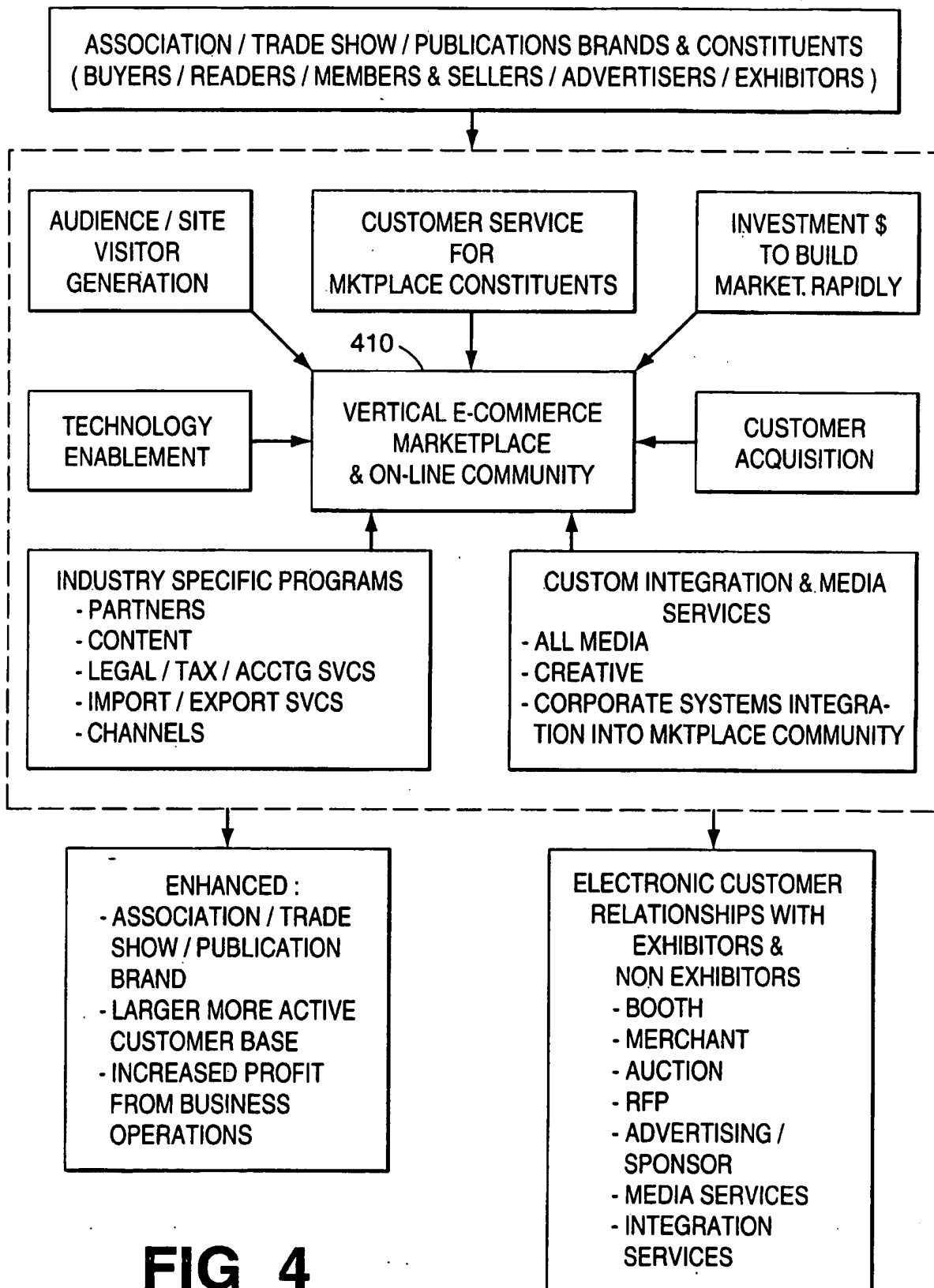
**FIG 2**

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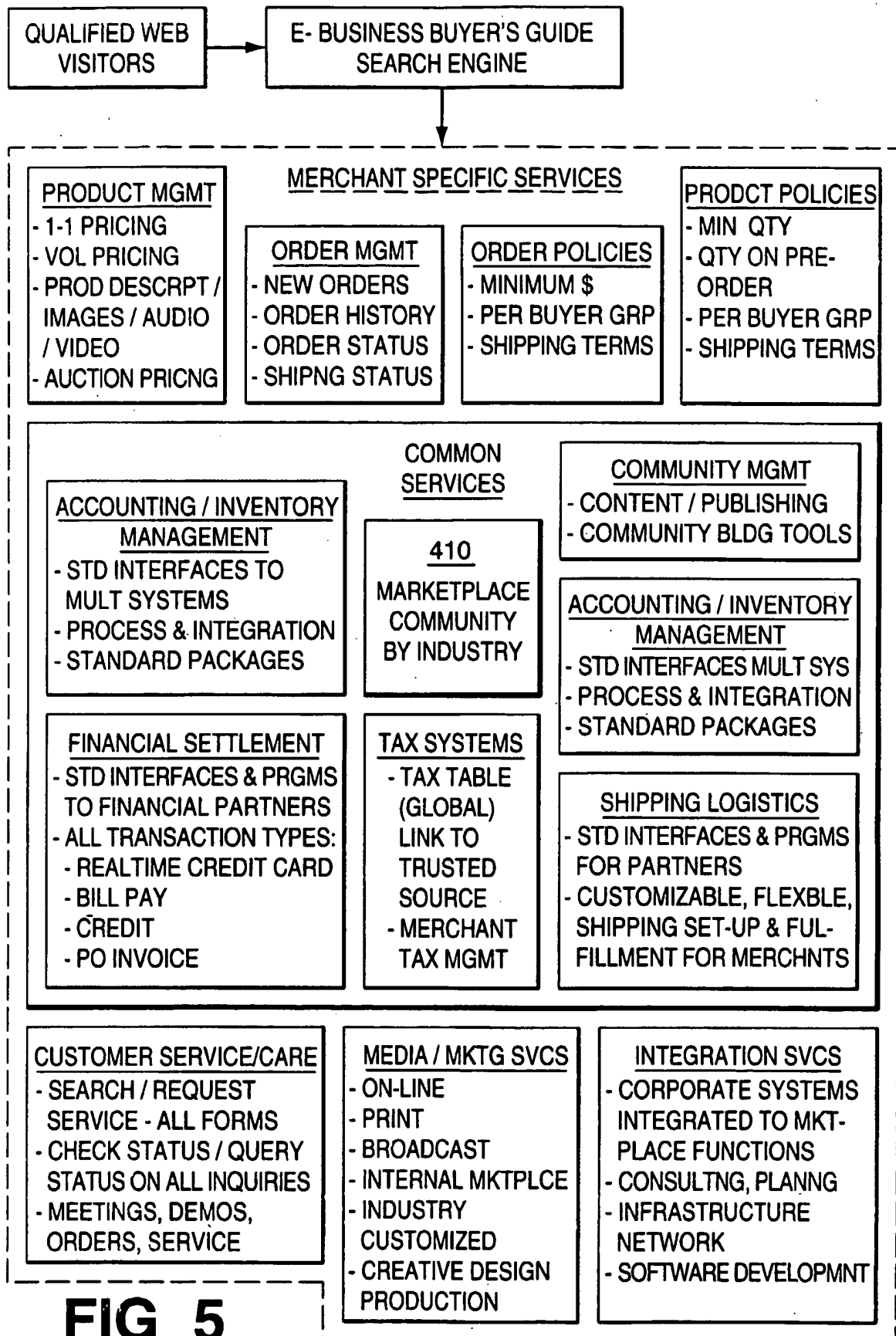
INVESTMENT IN MARKETPLACE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP
BLOCK DIAGRAM & FLOWCHART

**FIG 3**

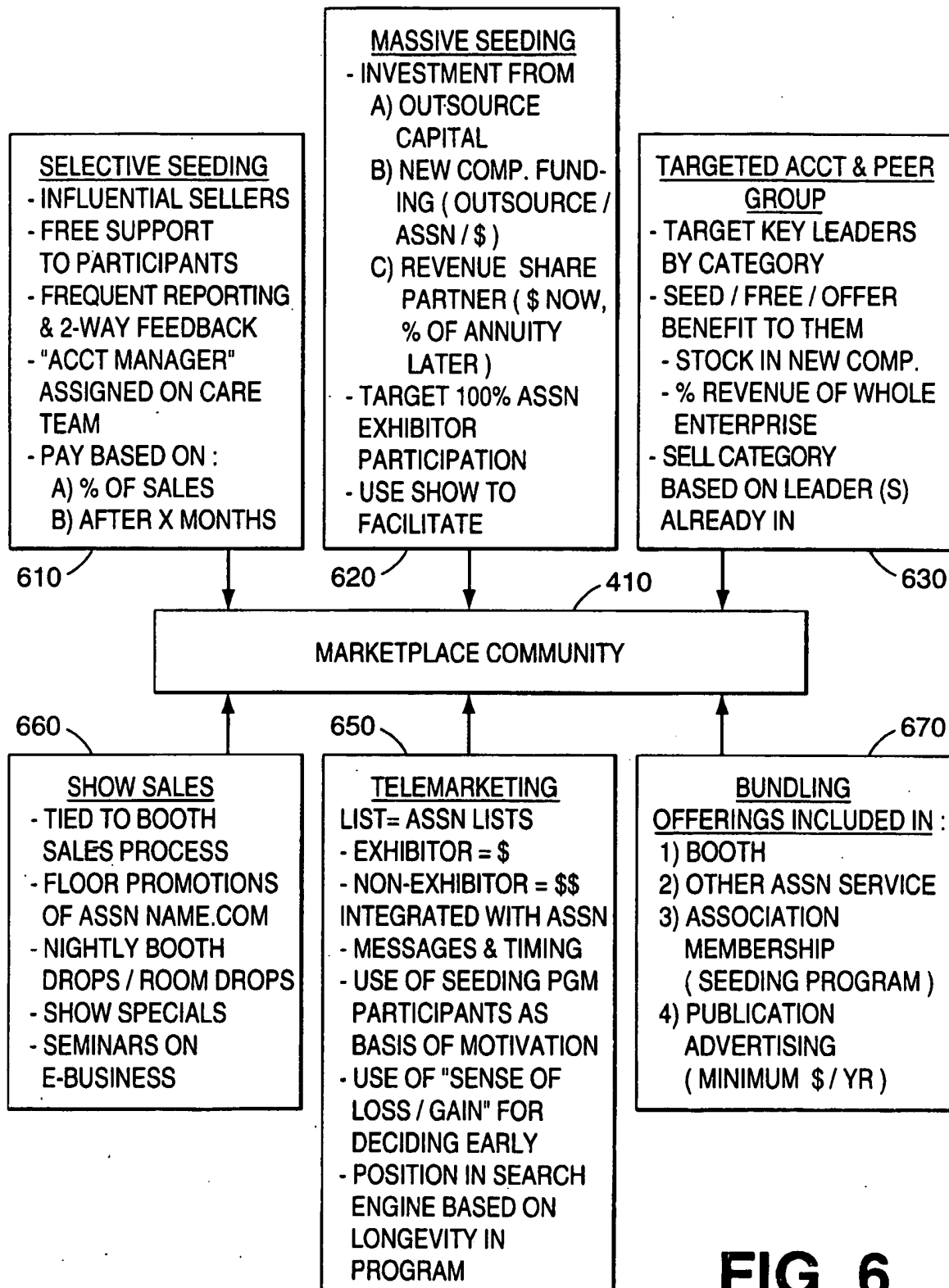
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MARKETPLACE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP SYSTEM**FIG 4**

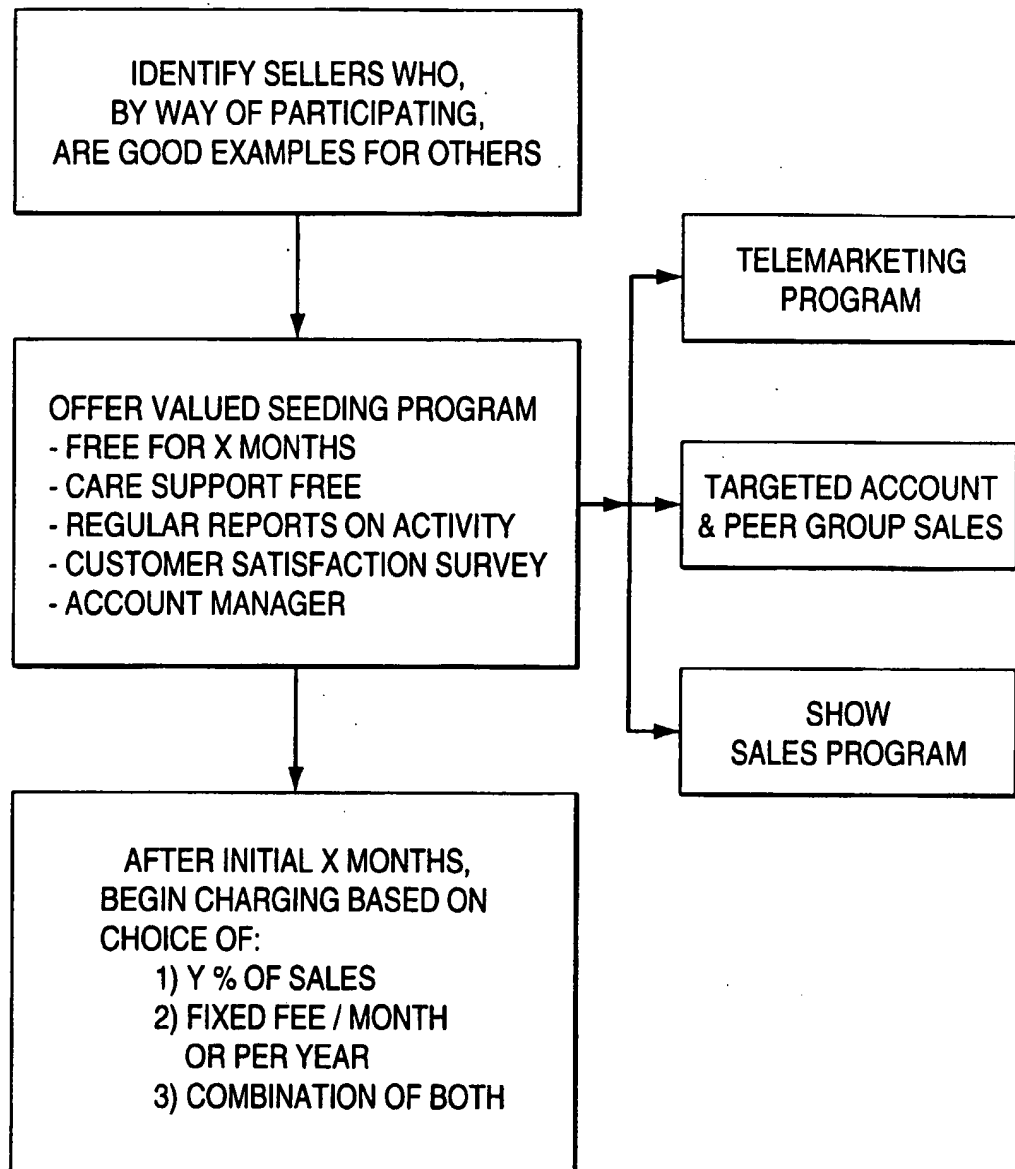
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MARKETPLACE COMMUNITY BLOCK DIAGRAM**FIG 5**

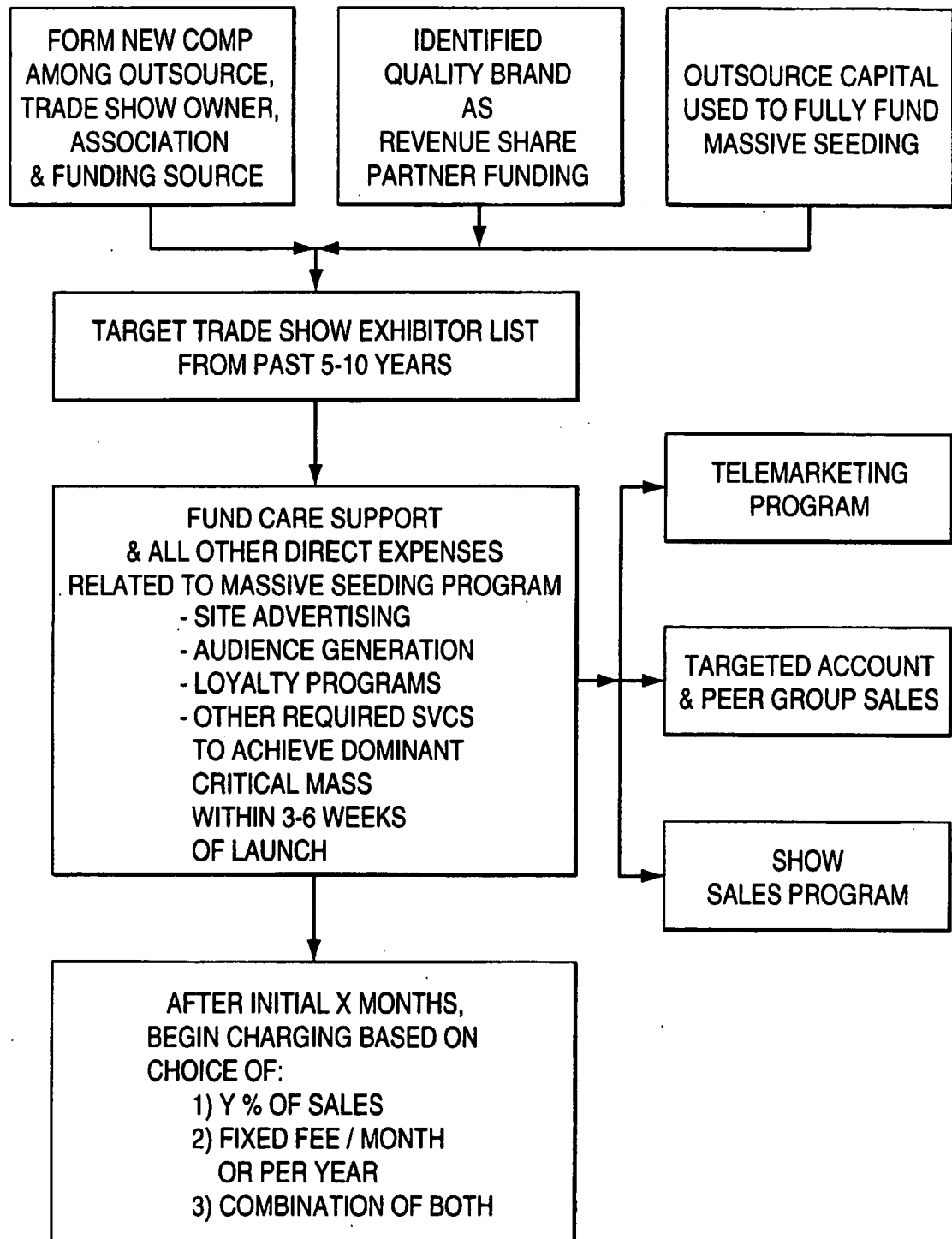
6/41

CUSTOMER ACQUISITION**FIG 6**

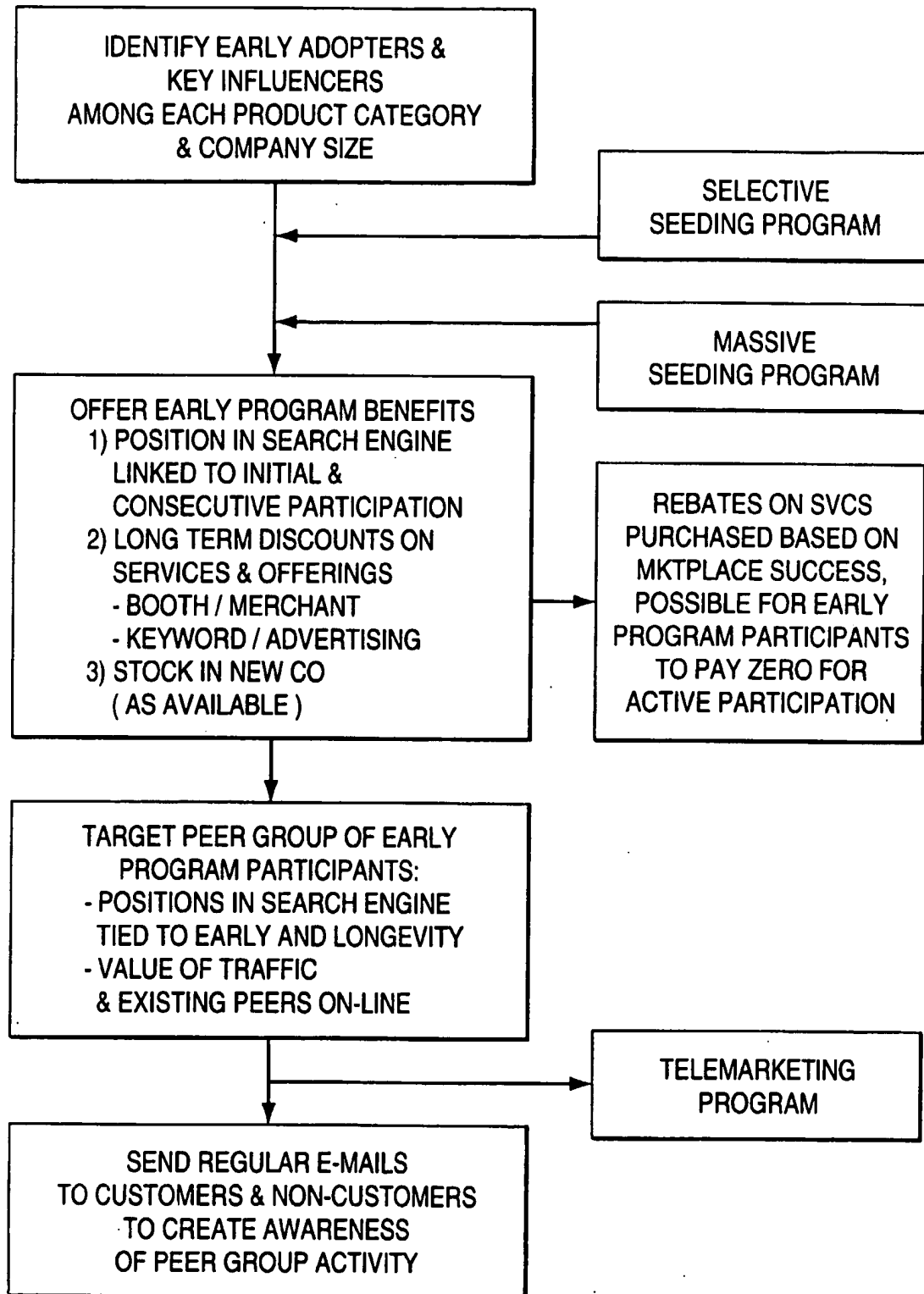
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SELECTIVE SEEDING FLOW CHART**FIG 7**

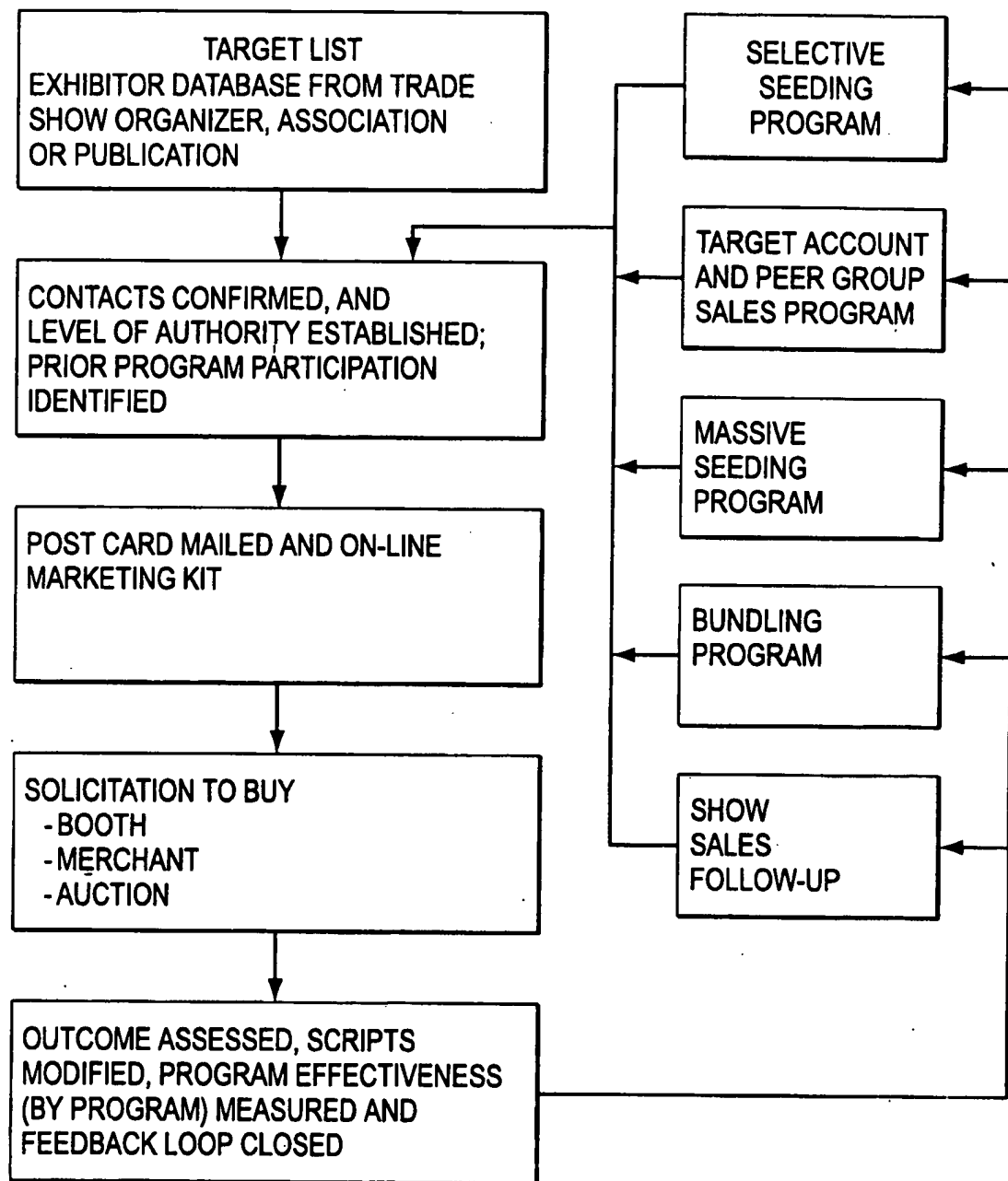
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MASSIVE SEEDING FLOW CHART**FIG 8**

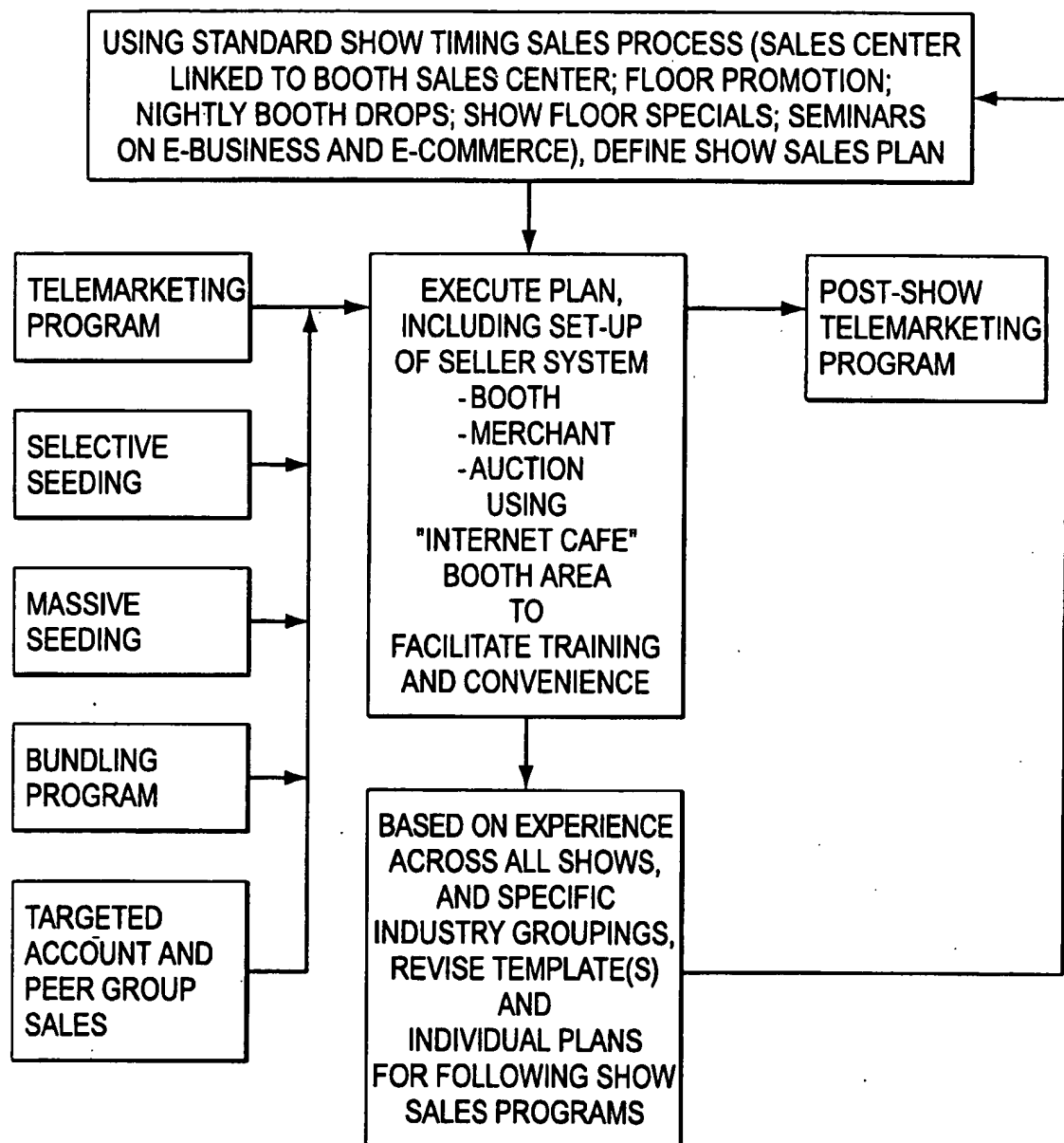
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TARGETED ACCOUNT & PEER GROUP SALES FLOW CHART**FIG 9**

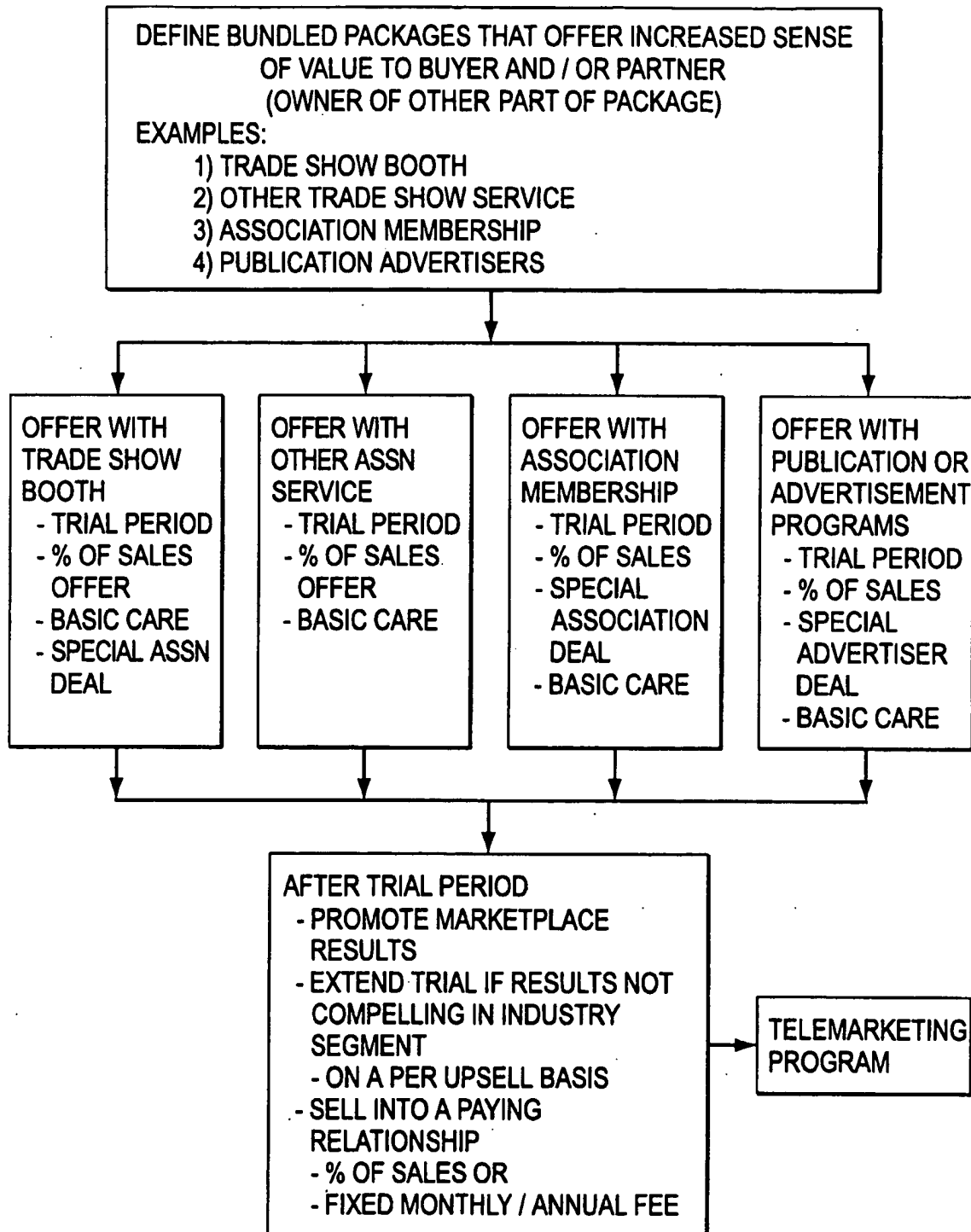
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TELEMARKETING FLOW CHART**FIG 10**

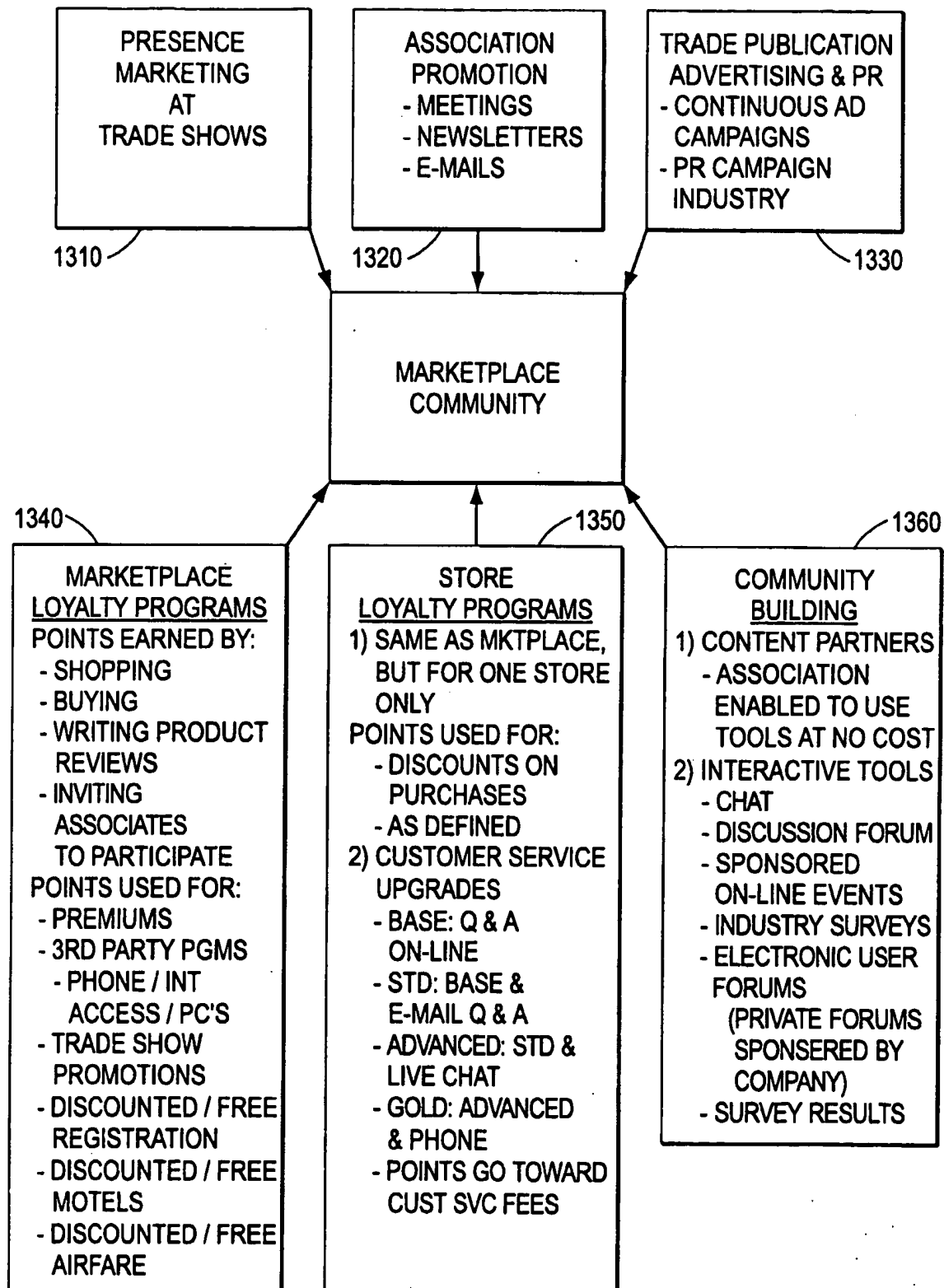
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SHOW SALES FLOW CHART**FIG 11**

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BUNDLING FLOW CHART**FIG 12**

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MARKETPLACE AUDIENCE GENERATION & RETENTION**FIG 13**

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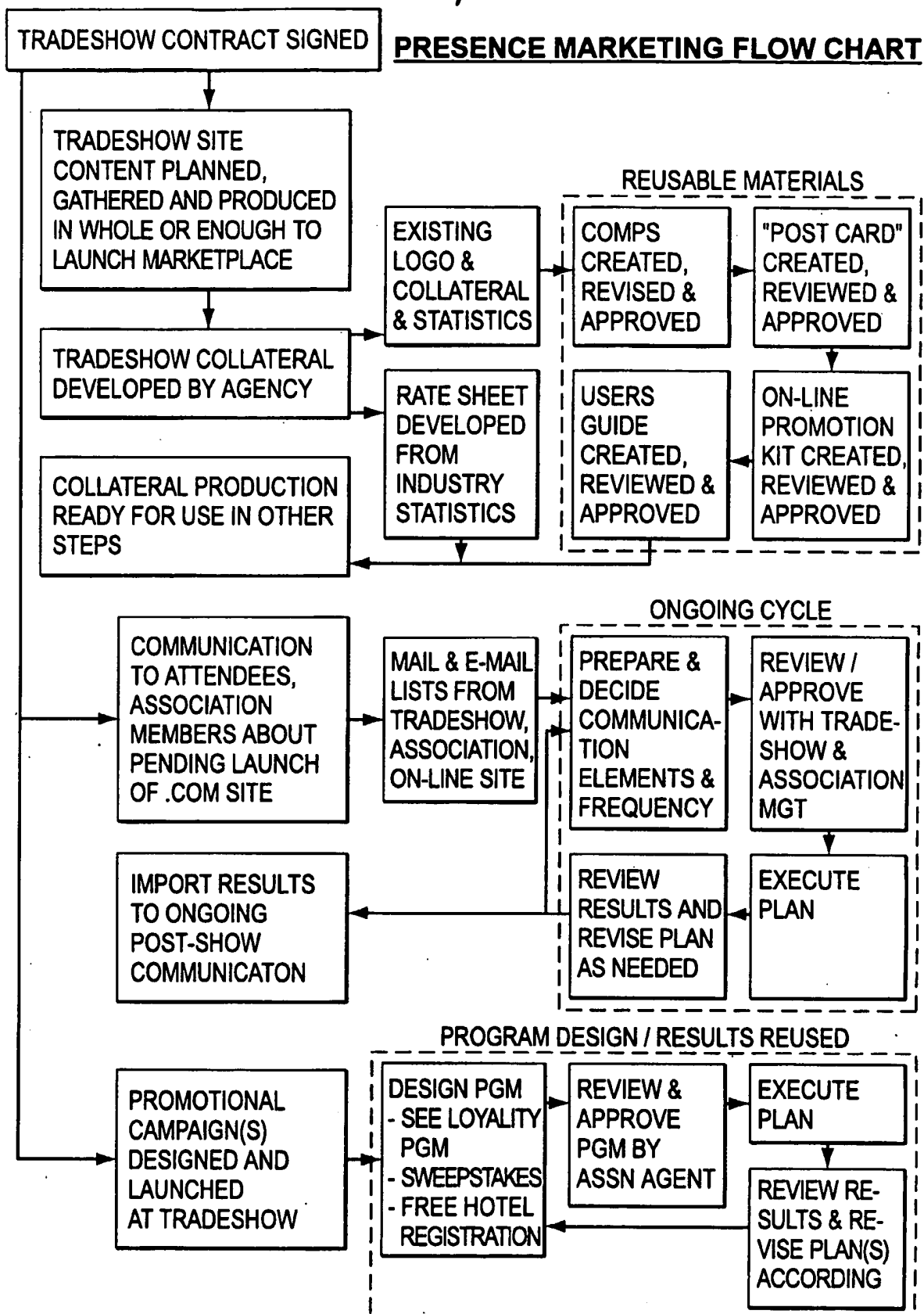
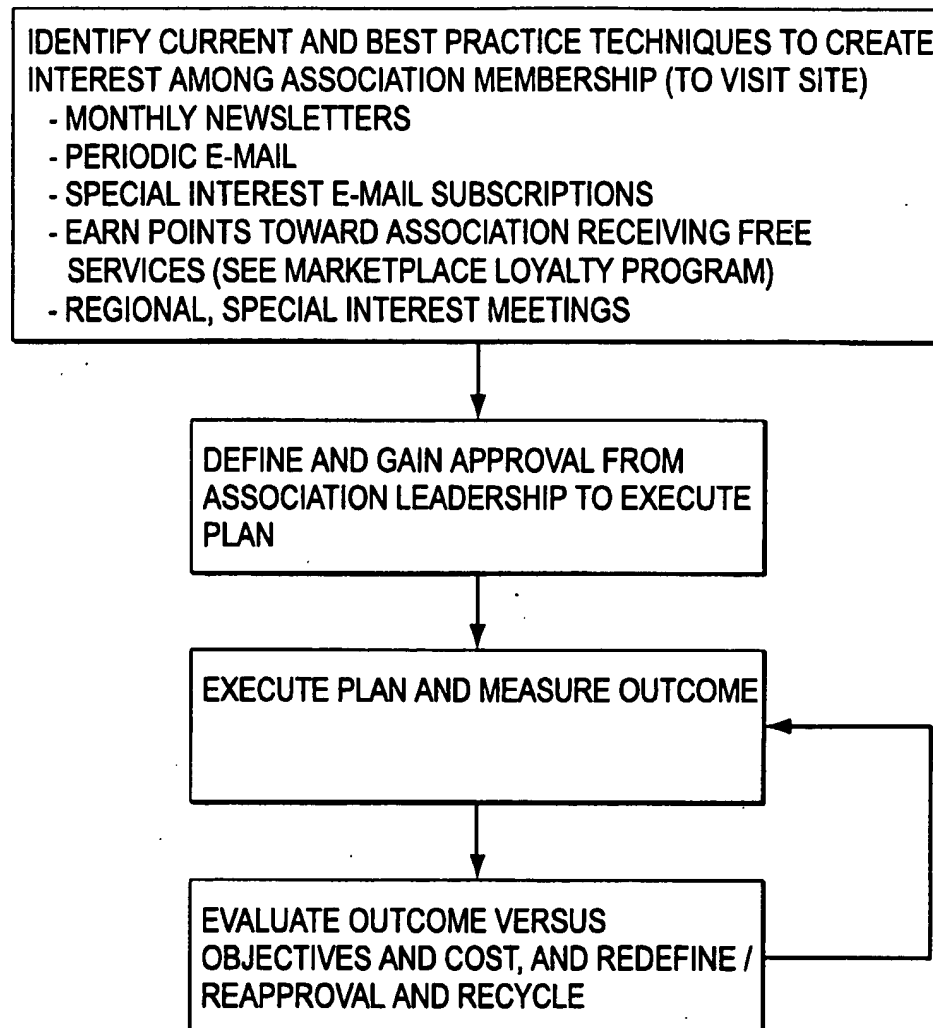
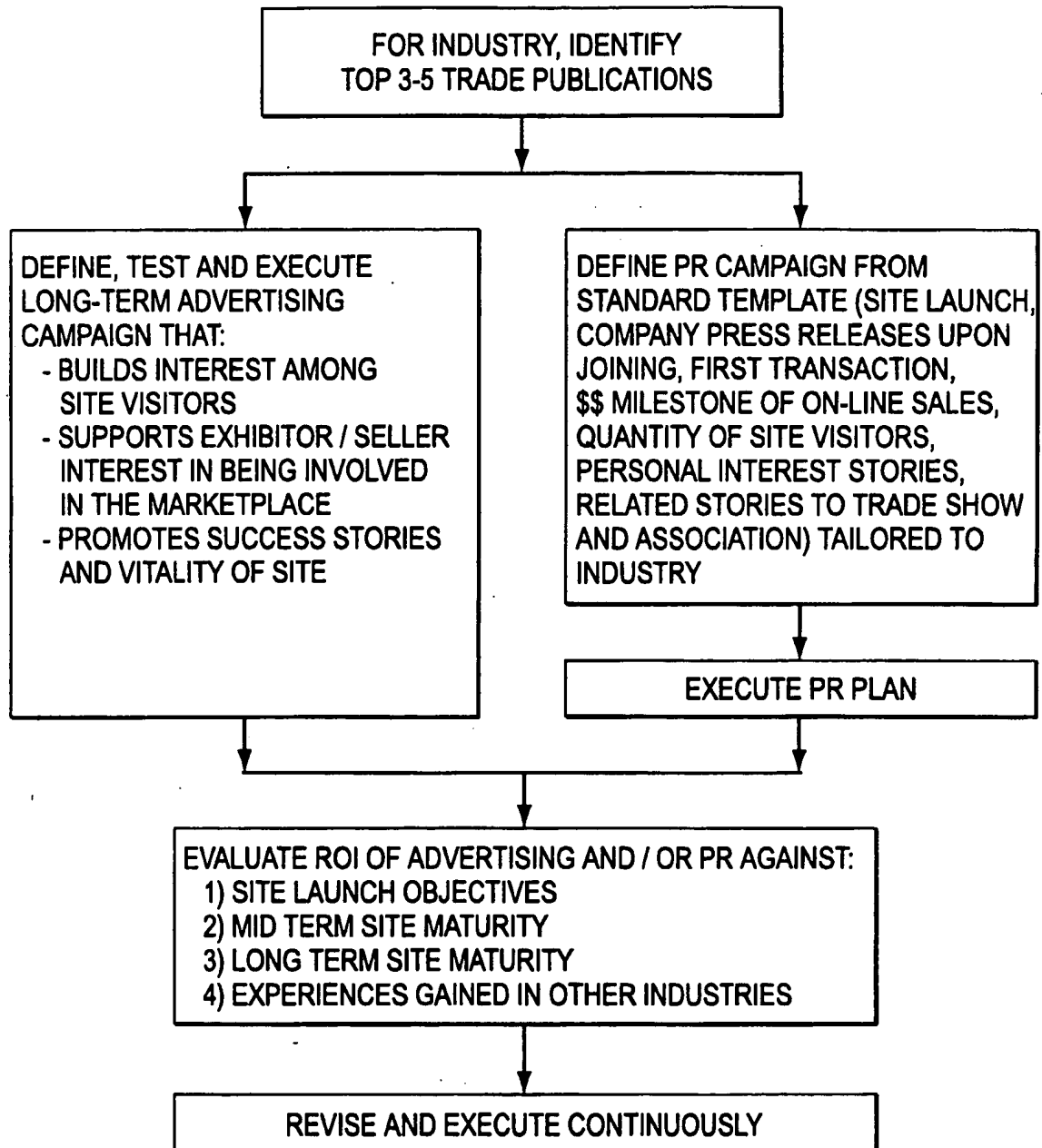


FIG 14

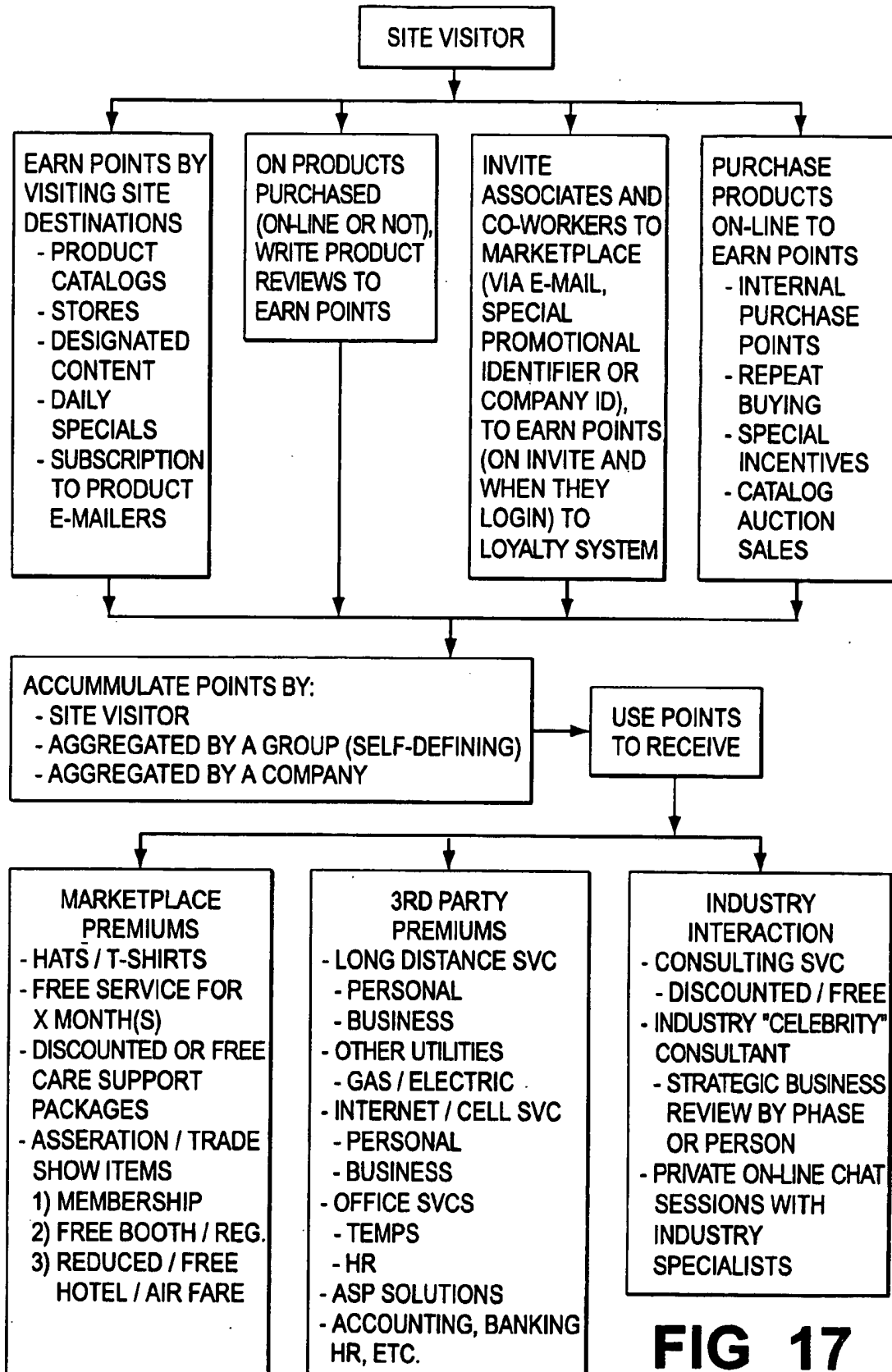
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ASSOCIATION PROMOTION FLOW CHART**FIG 15**

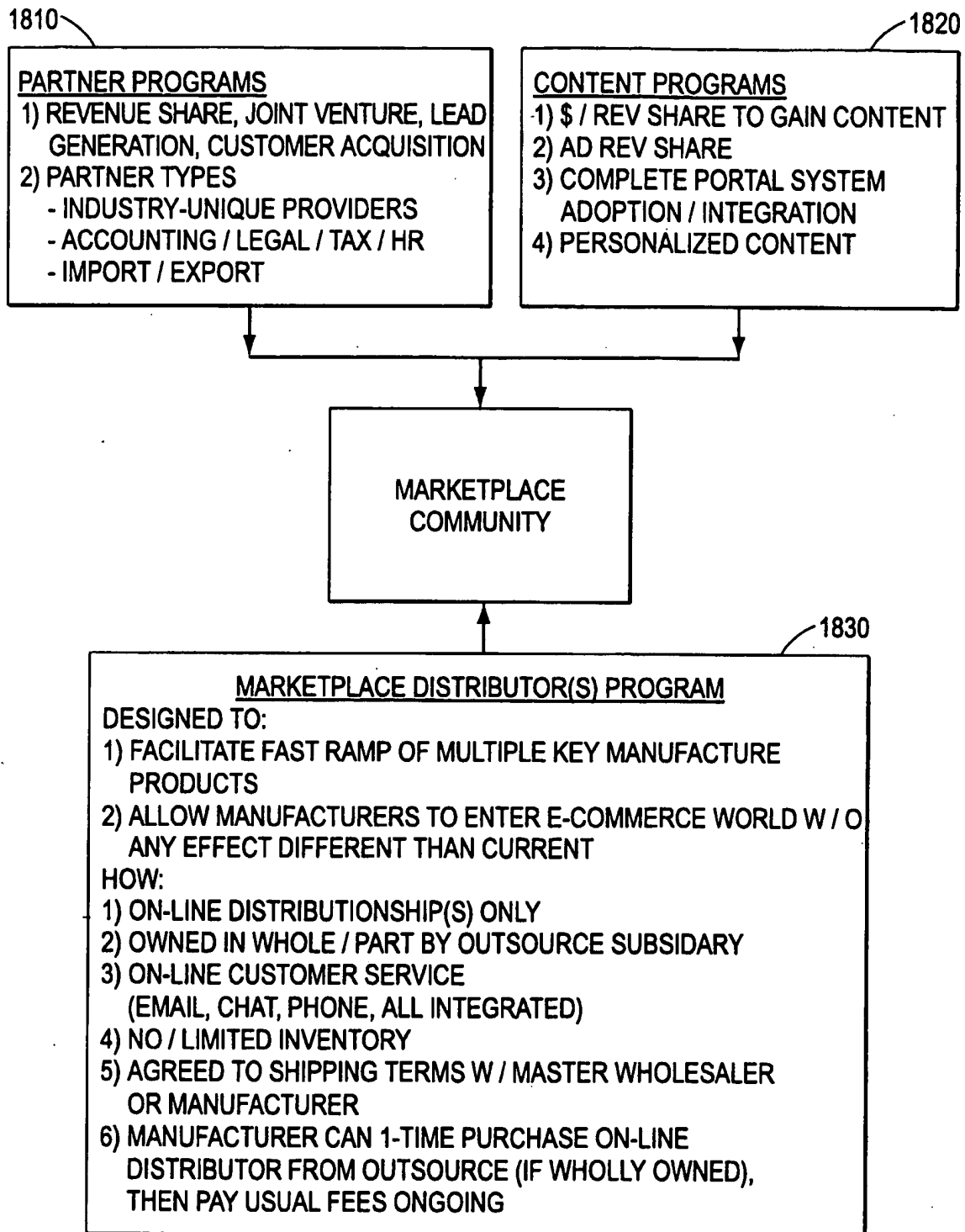
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TRADE PUBLICATION ADVERTISING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS**FIG 16**

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MARKETPLACE LOYALTY PROGRAM FLOW CHART**FIG 17**

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INDUSTRY SPECIFIC PROGRAMS**FIG 18**

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MEDIA AND INTEGRATION SERVICES**CUSTOM MEDIA SERVICES**

- ALL MEDIA FORMATS (ON-LINE, PRINT, BROADCAST)
- INTERNAL MARKETPLACE
- INDUSTRY SPECIFIED PACKAGE (PRE-PURCHASED INDUSTRY INVENTORY CROSS MEDIA)
- CREATIVE DESIGN AND PRODUCTION (BY OUTSOURCE OR 3RD PARTY)
- ON-LINE MARKETING PLANS

**ELECTRONIC
CUSTOMER**

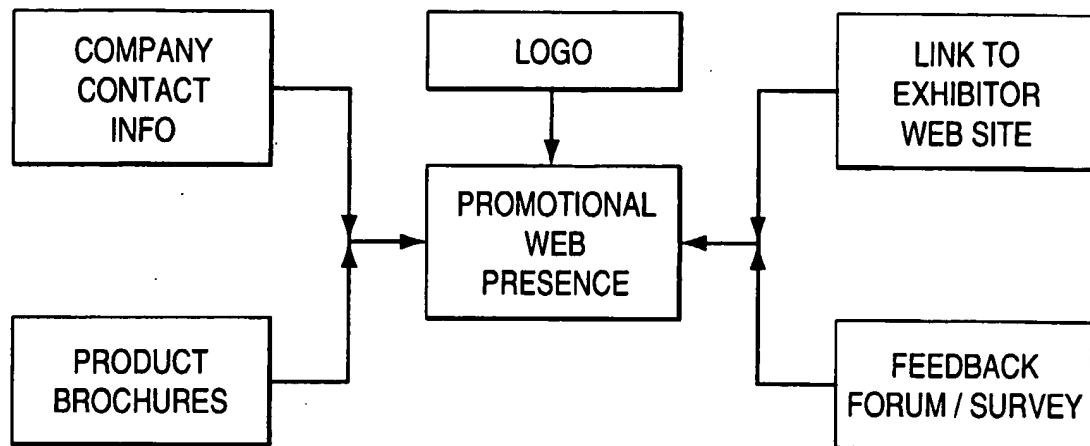
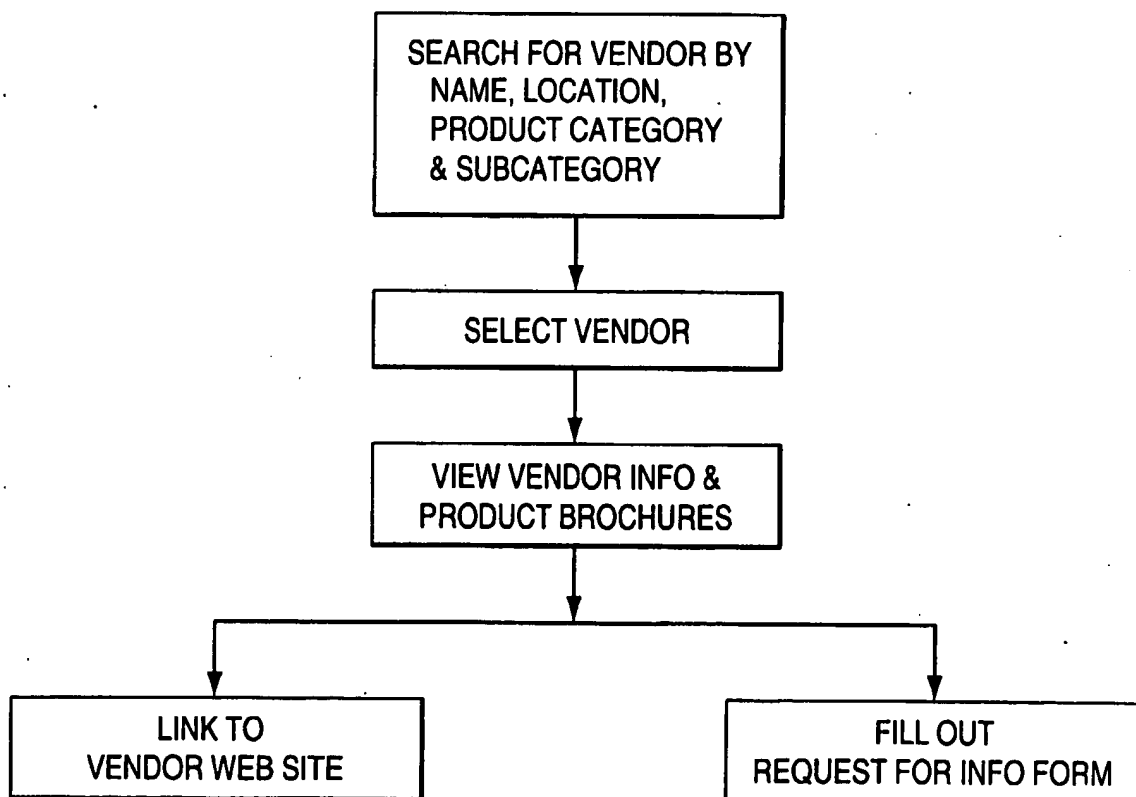
- BOOTH
- MERCHANT
- AUCTION
- OTHER

CUSTOM INTEGRATION SERVICES

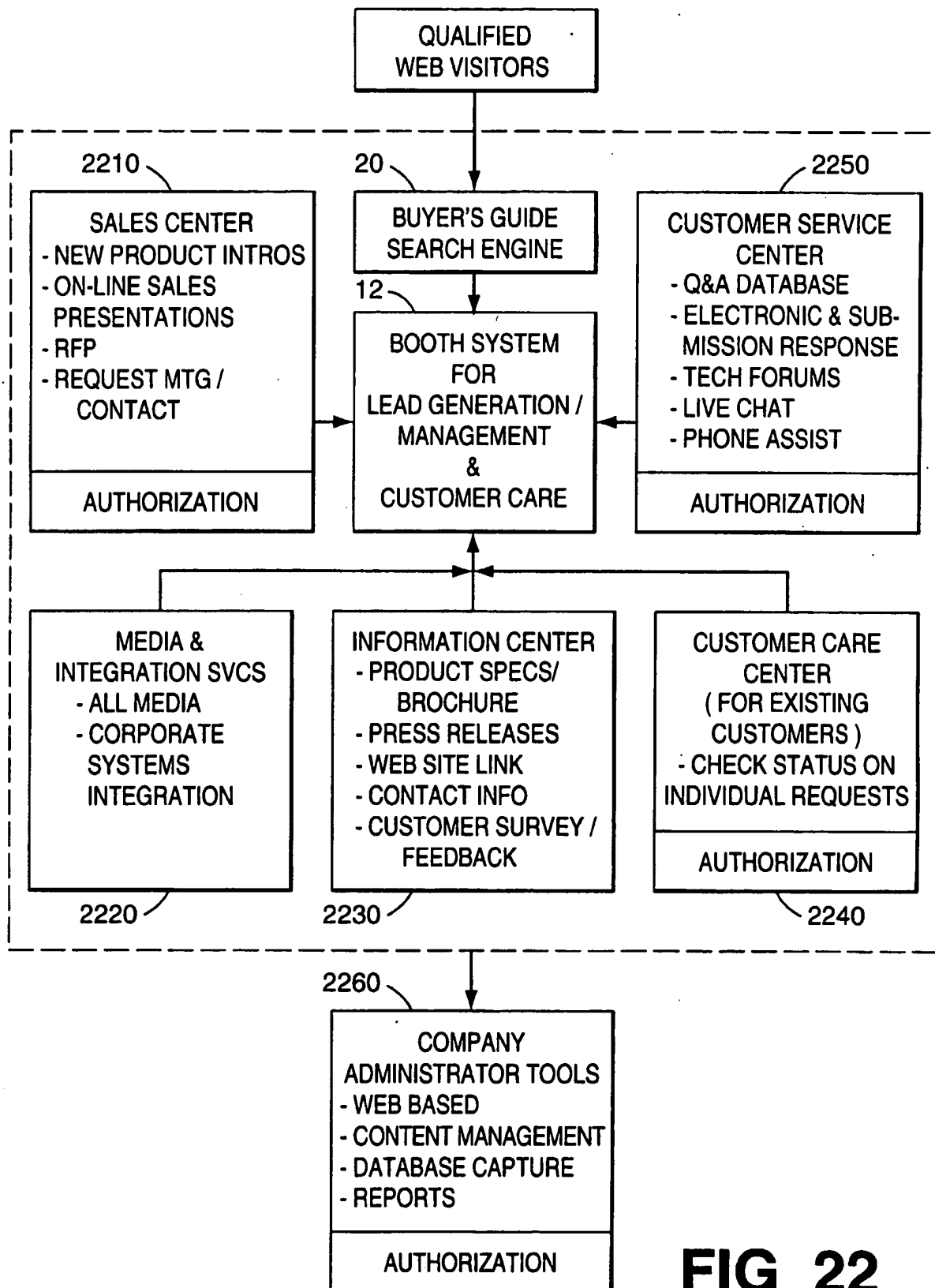
- E-BUSINESS PLANS
(CUSTOM \$ OR PACKAGED BY INDUSTRY \$)
- E-BUSINESS CONSULTING
(BY OUTSOURCE OR 3RD PARTY)
- INTERNET INFRASTRUCTURE - CONNECTIVITY, HARDWARE /
SOFTWARE / NETWORK
(BY OUTSOURCE OR 3RD PARTY)
- APPLICATION AND SYSTEM INTEGRATION: TIED TO
MARKETPLACE COMMUNITY
(BY OUTSOURCE OR 3RD PARTY)

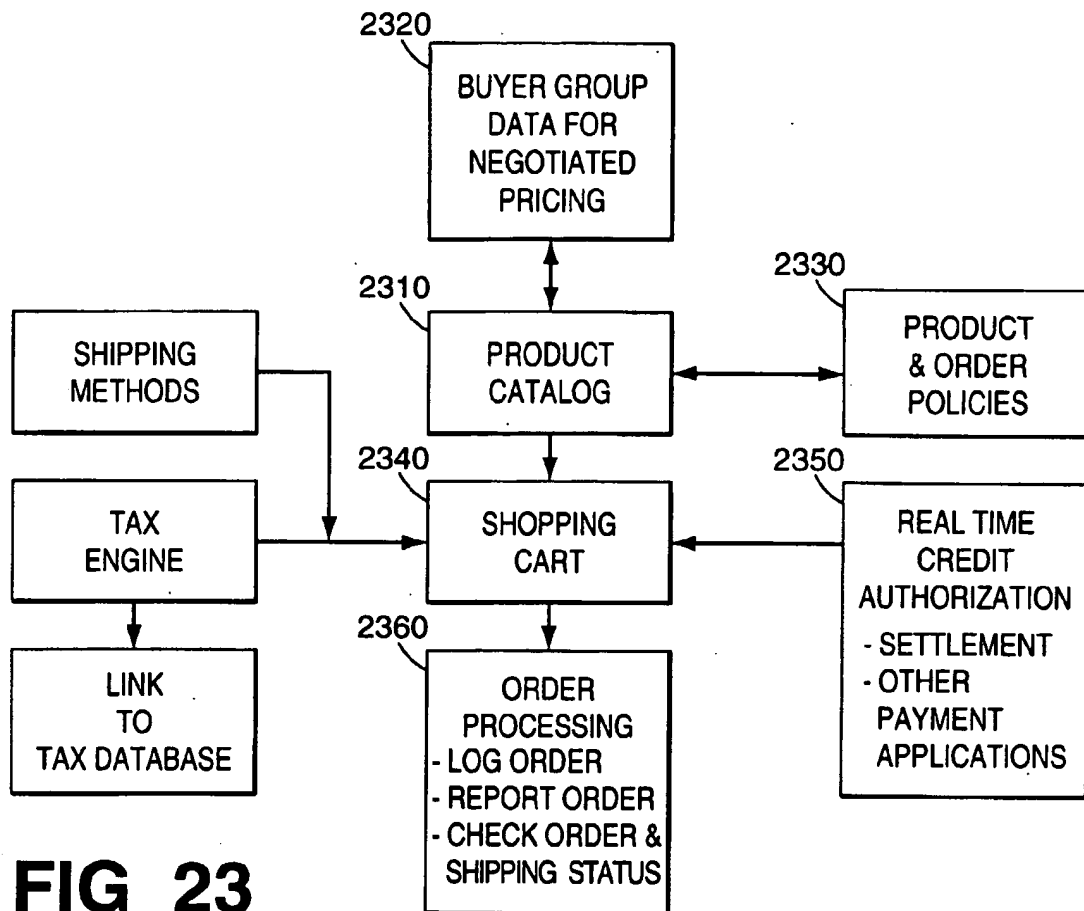
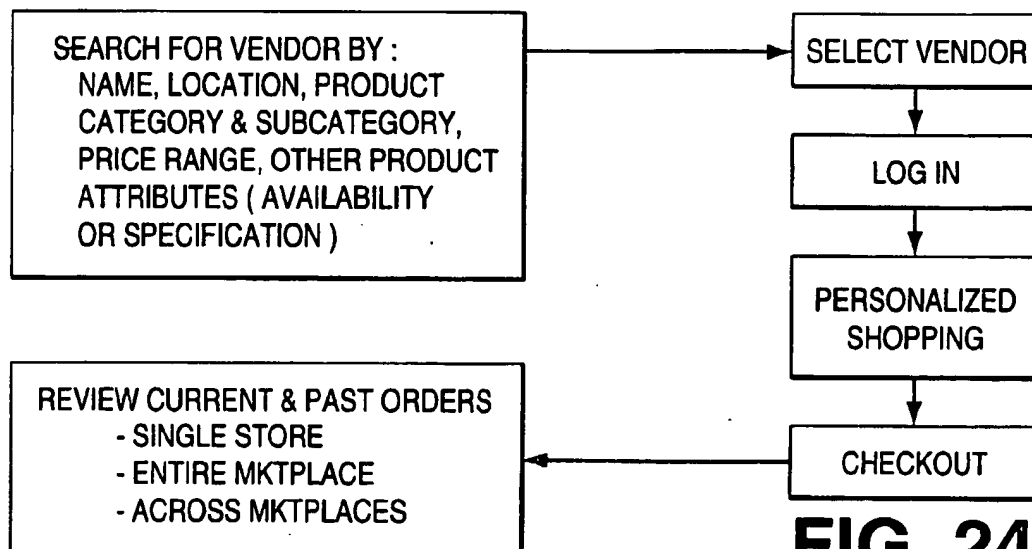
FIG 19

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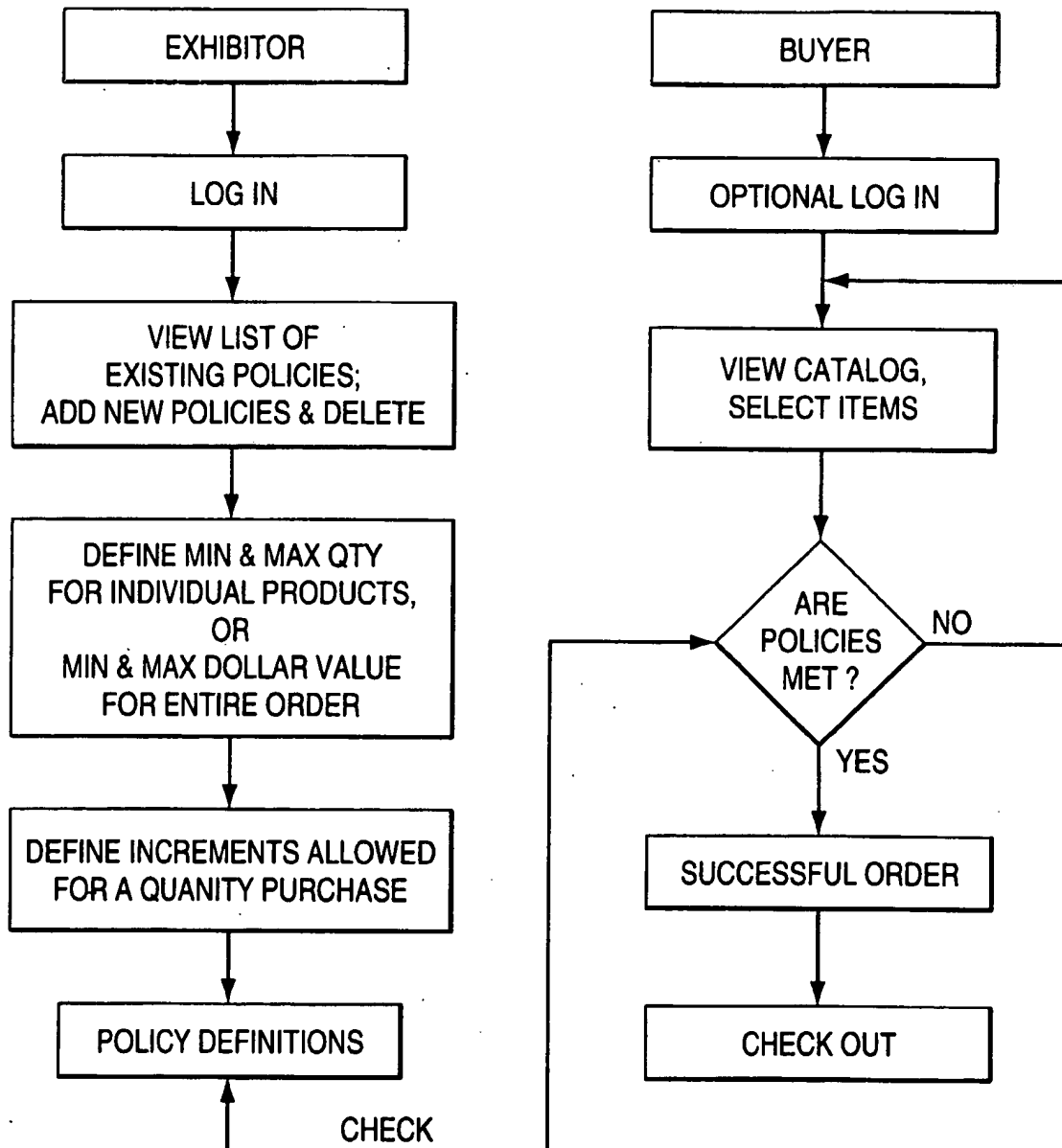
BOOTH BLOCK DIAGRAM**FIG 20****CONSUMER BOOTH FLOW CHART****FIG 21**

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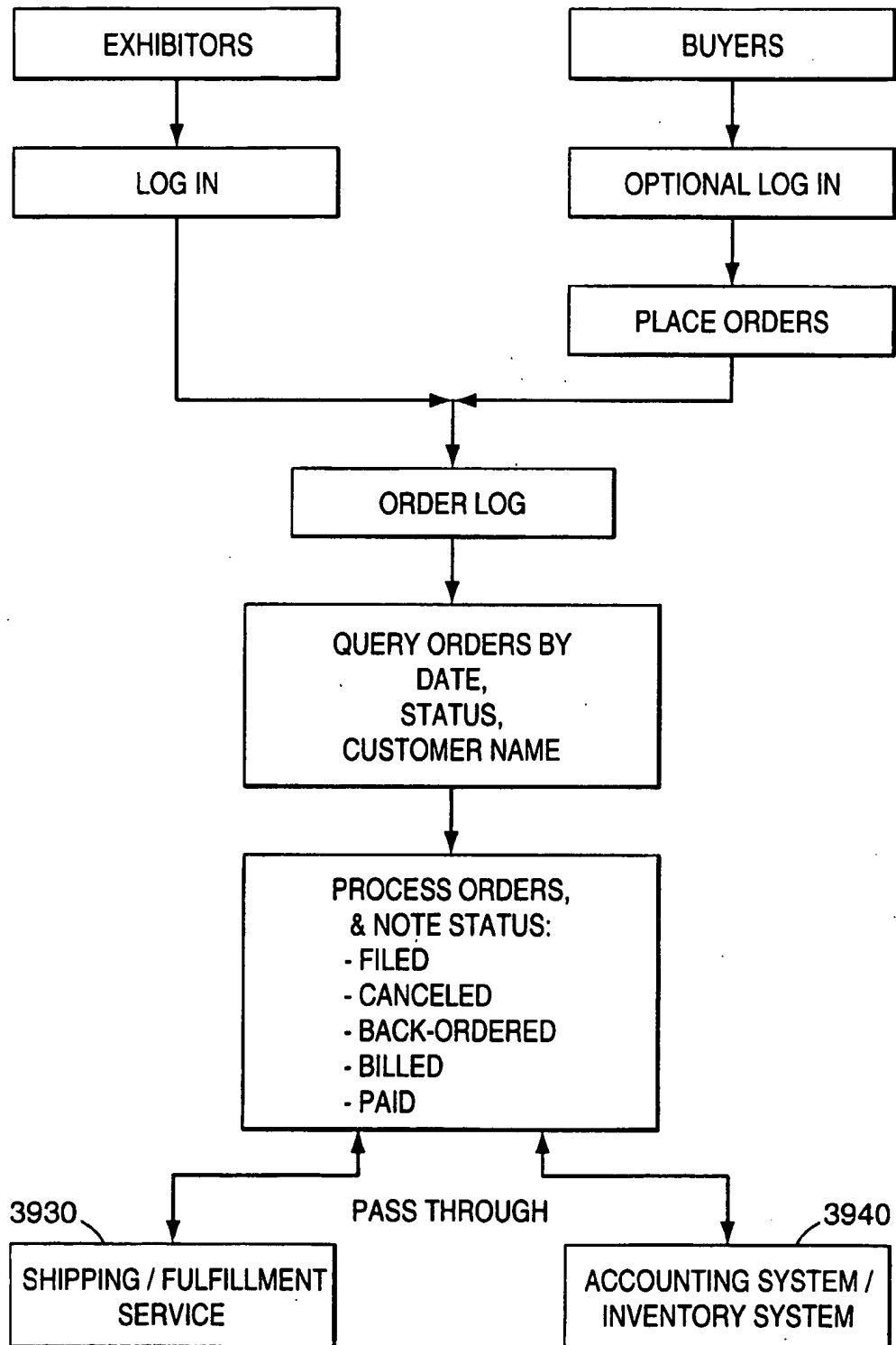
E-BUSINESS BUYER'S GUIDE / BOOTH BLOCK DIAGRAM**FIG 22**

22 / 41**MERCHANT BLOCK DIAGRAM****FIG 23****CONSUMER MERCHANT FLOW CHART****FIG 24**

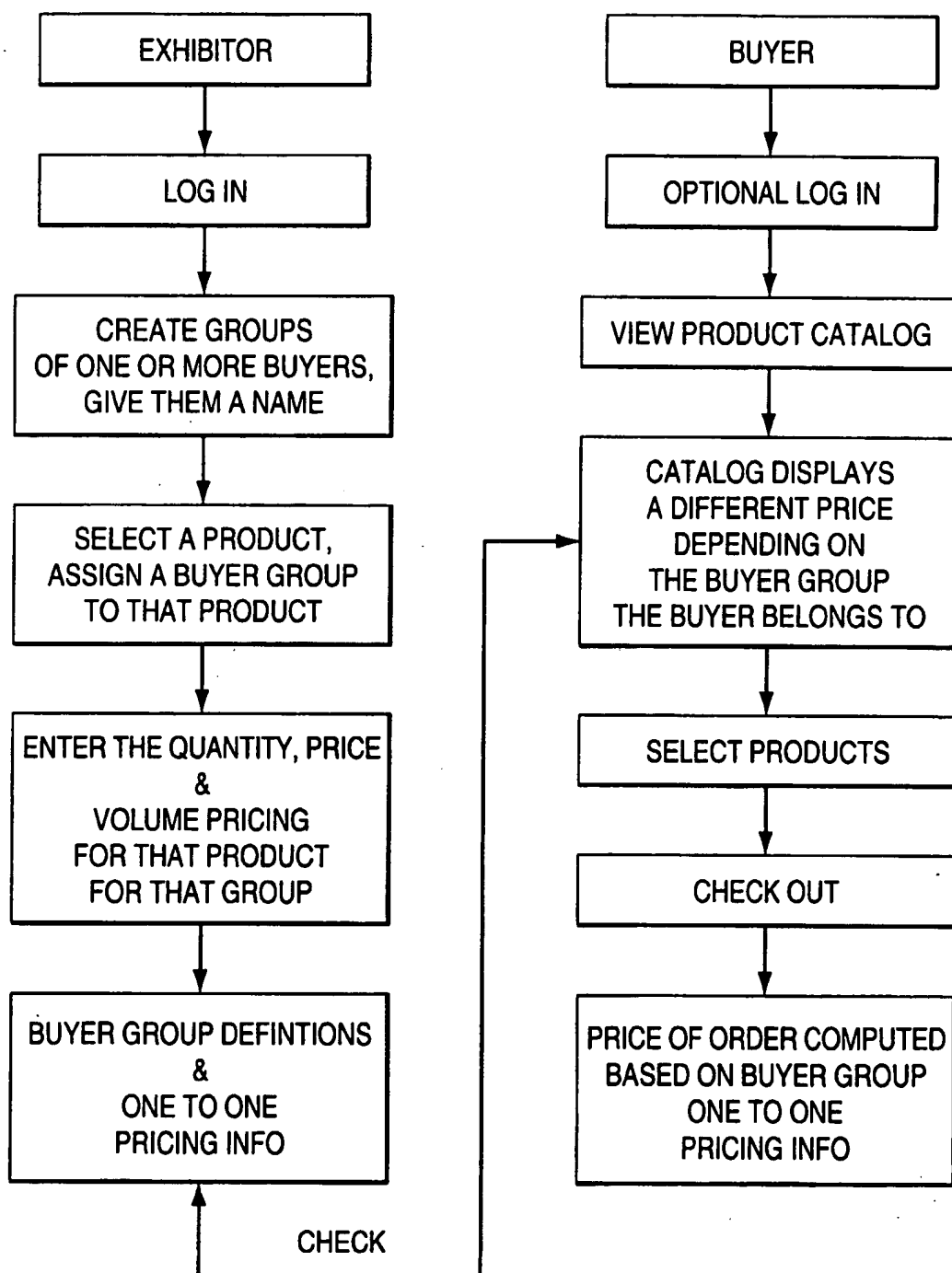
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MERCHANT ORDER & PRODUCT POLICIES**FIG 25**

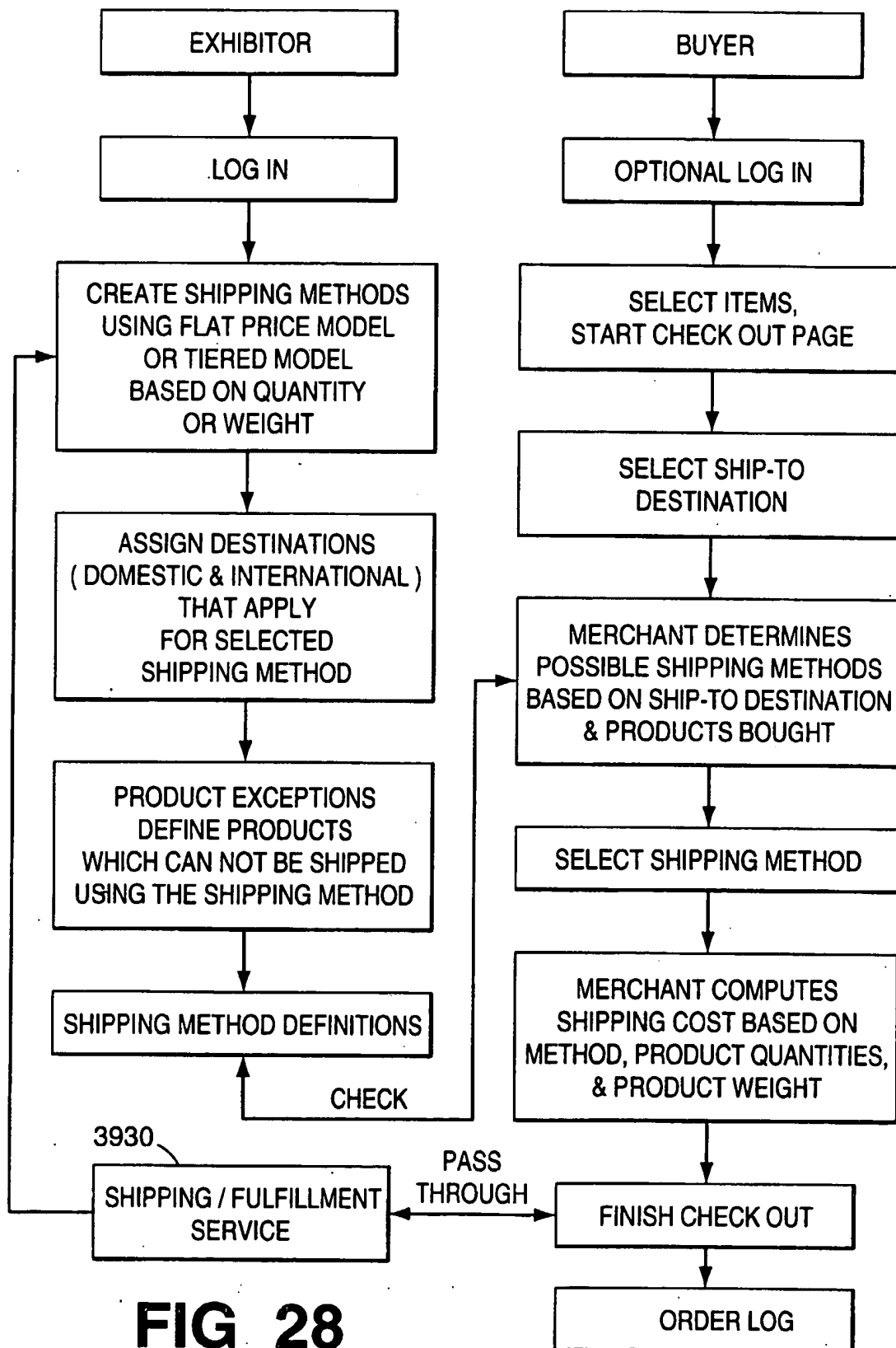
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MERCHANT ORDER MANAGEMENT**FIG 26**

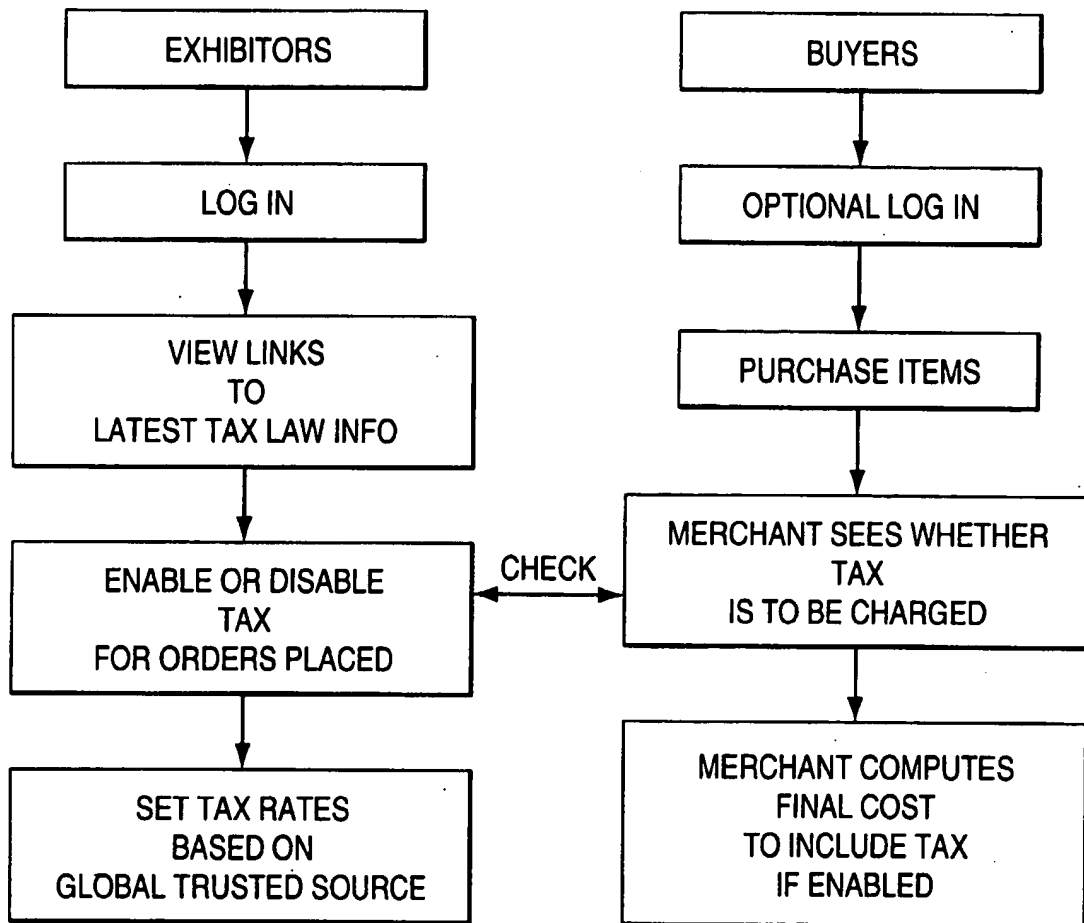
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MERCHANT BUYER GROUP MANAGEMENT**FIG 27**

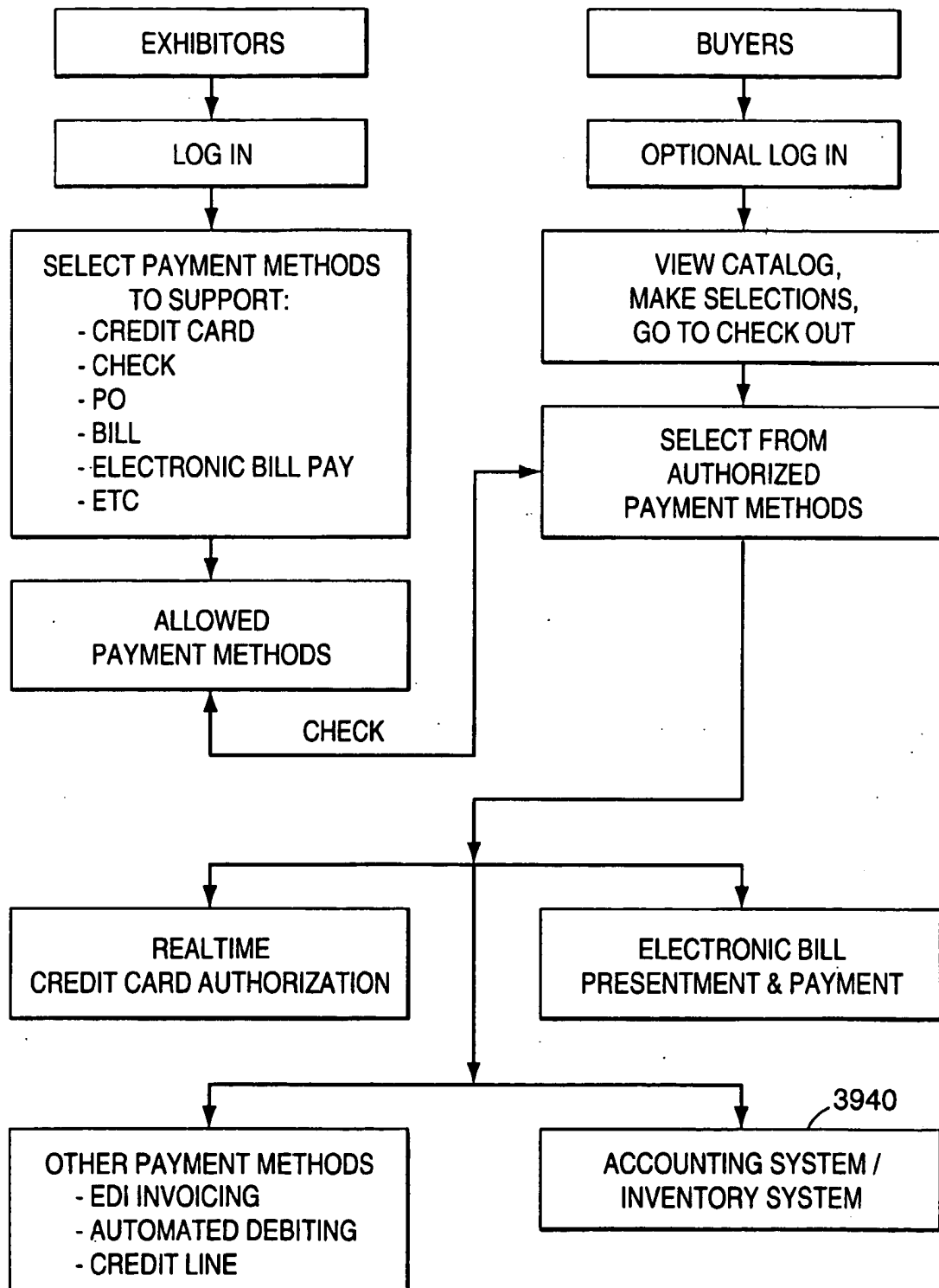
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MERCHANT SHIPPING MANAGEMENT**FIG 28**

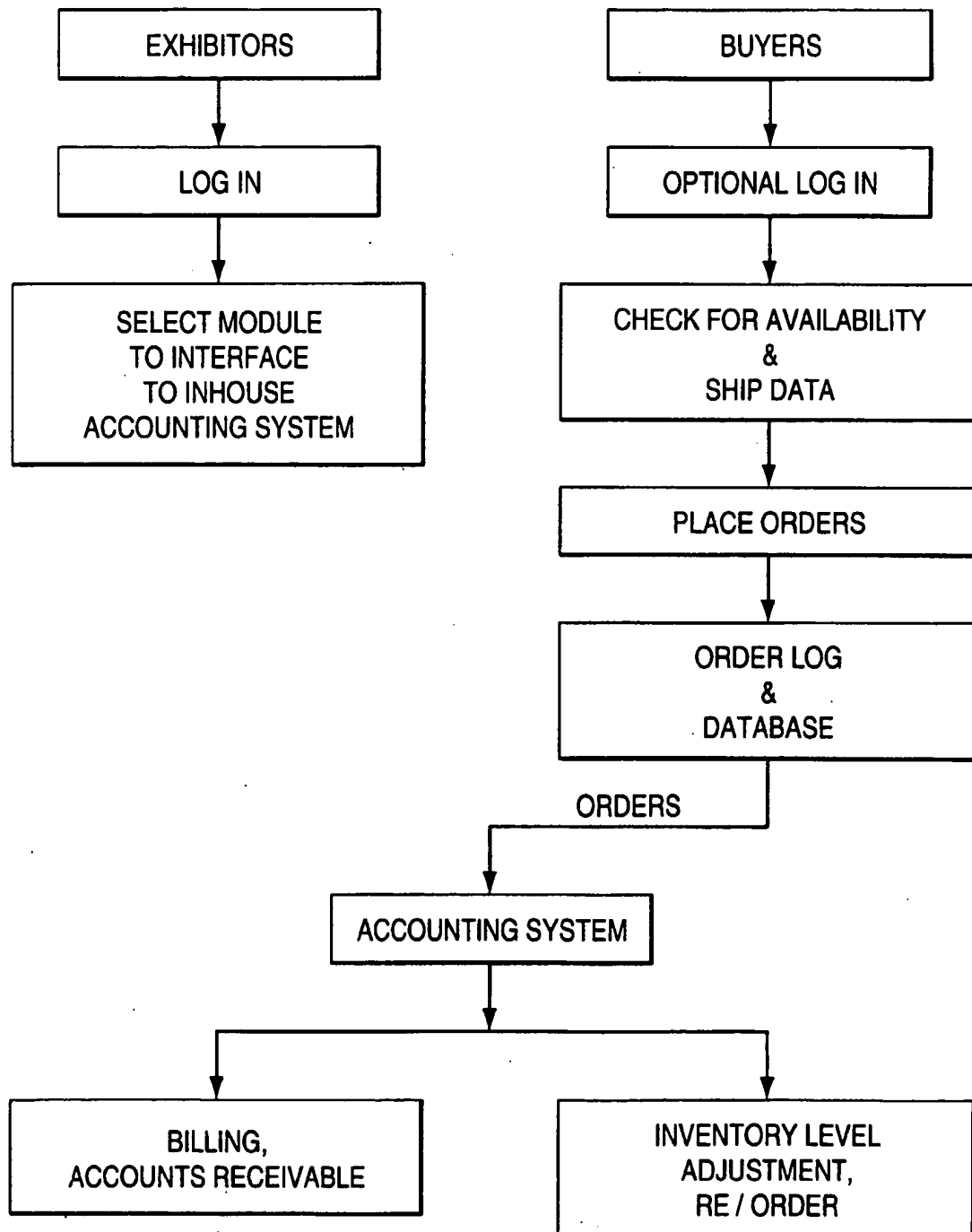
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MERCHANT TAX SYSTEM**FIG 29**

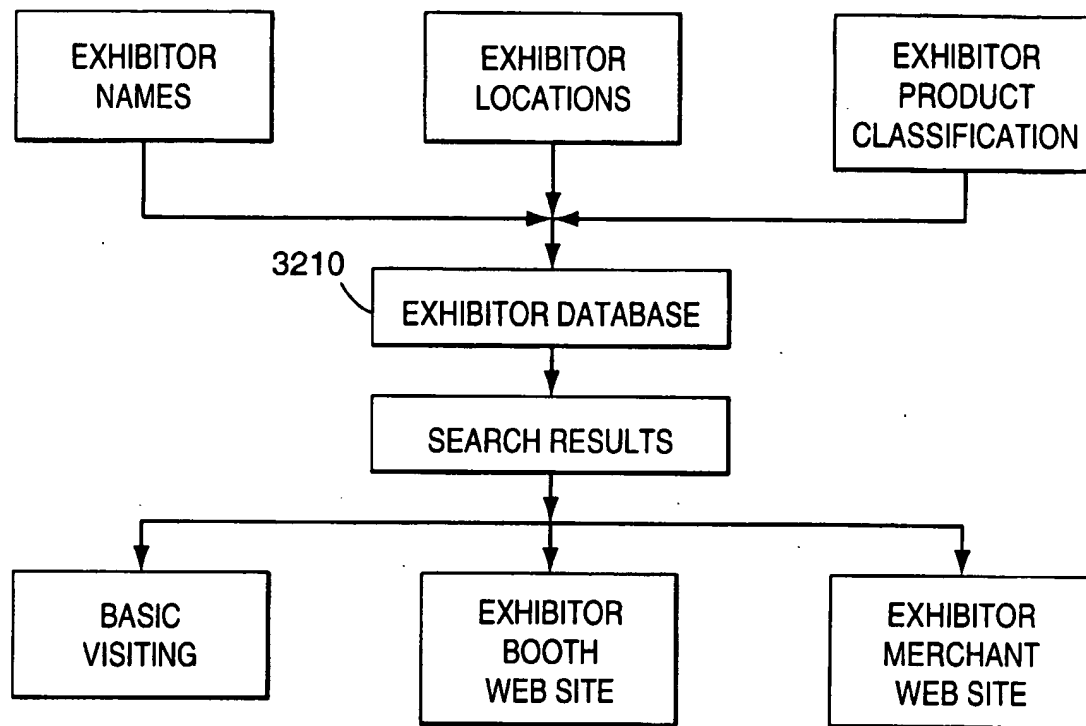
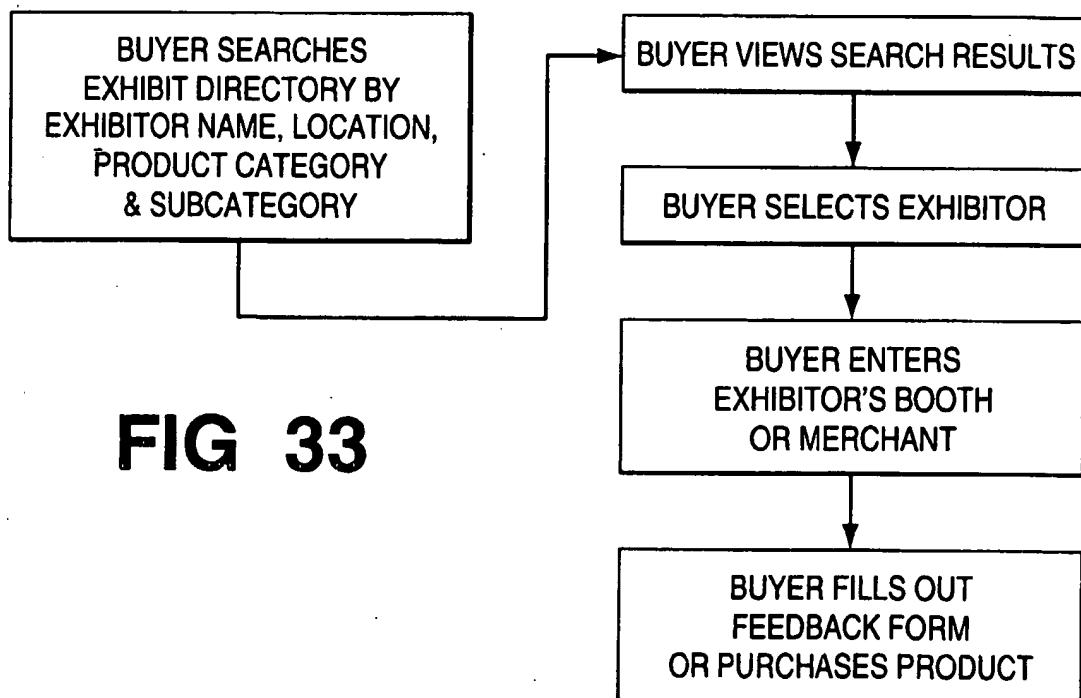
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MERCHANT FINANCIAL SETTLEMENT**FIG 30**

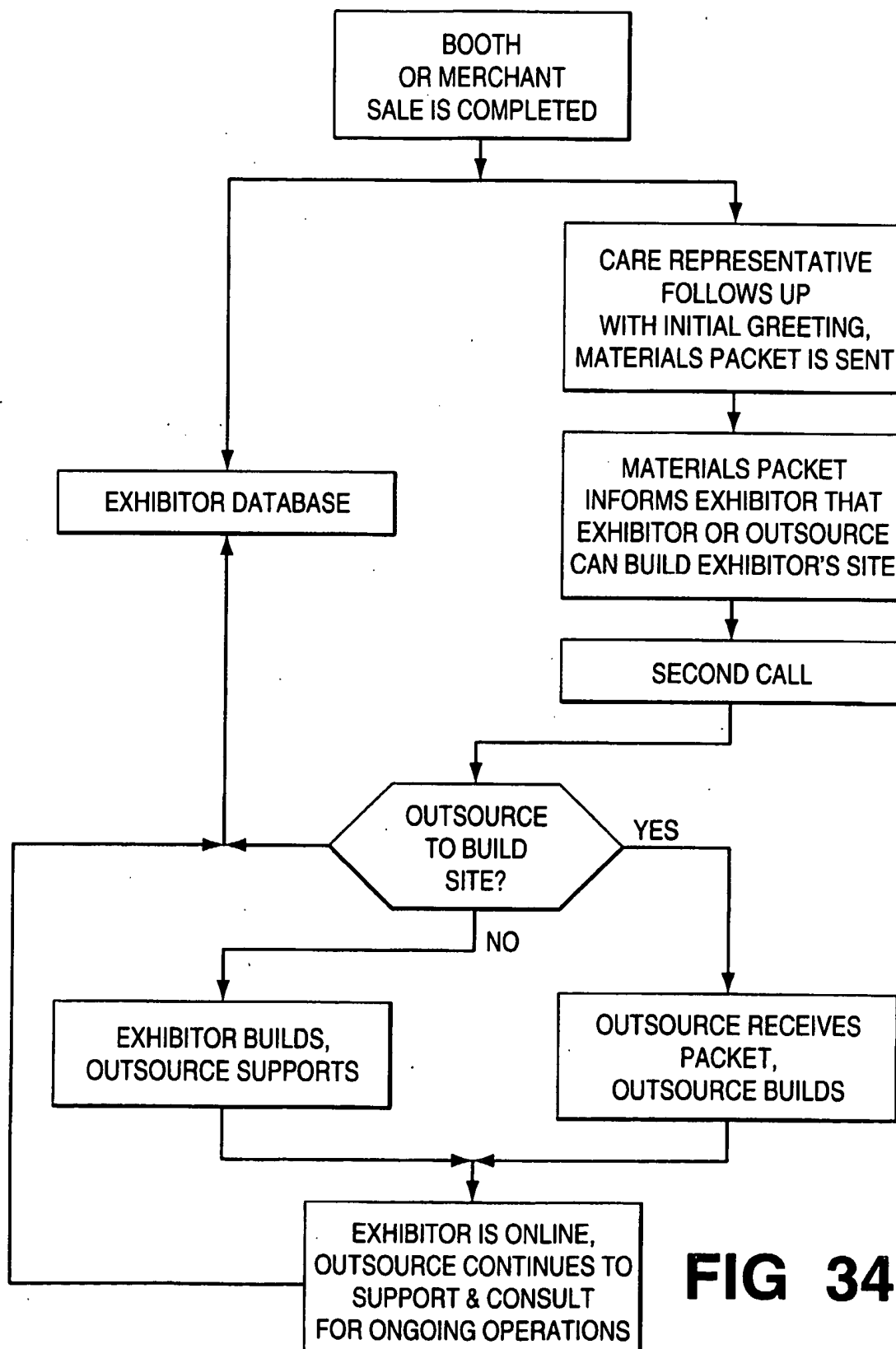
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MERCHANT ACCOUNTING & INVENTORY MANAGEMENT**FIG 31**

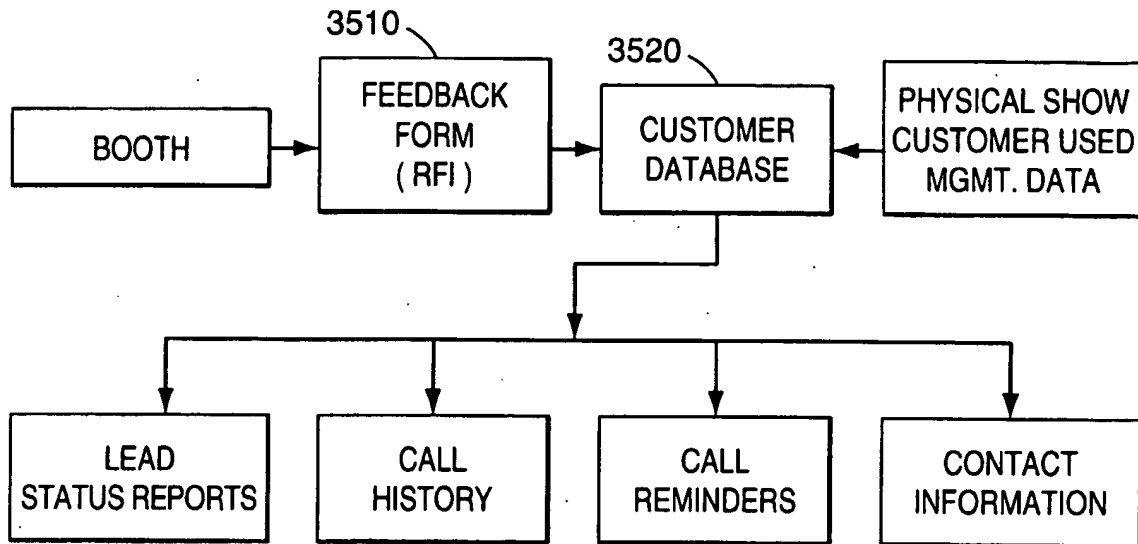
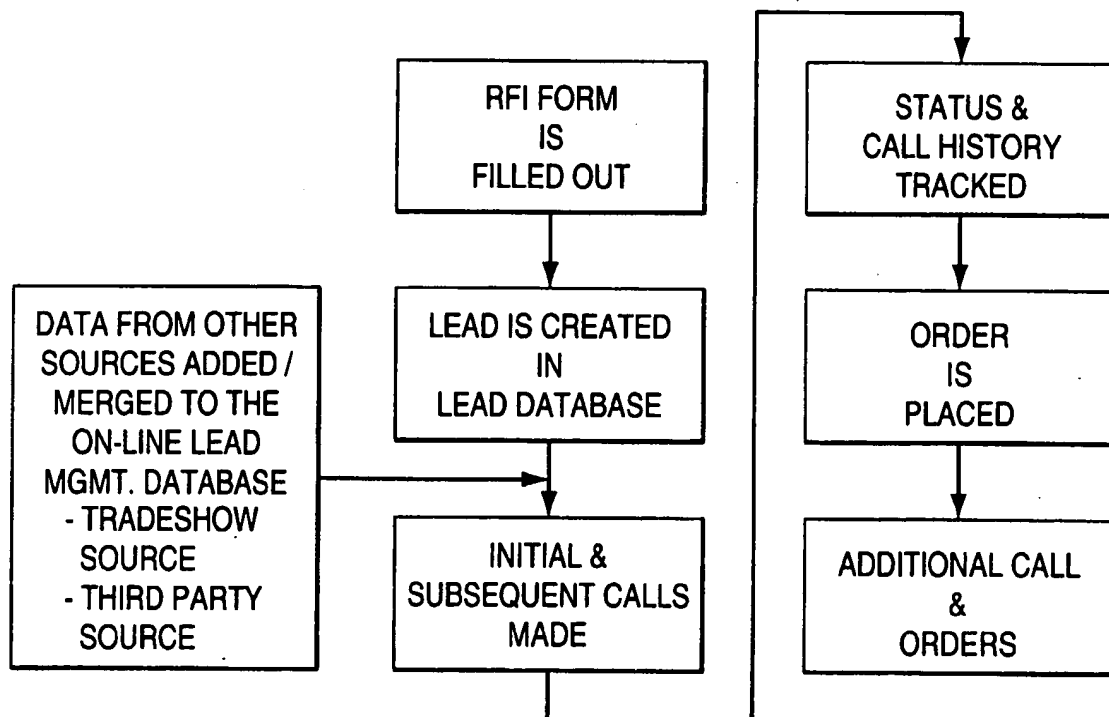
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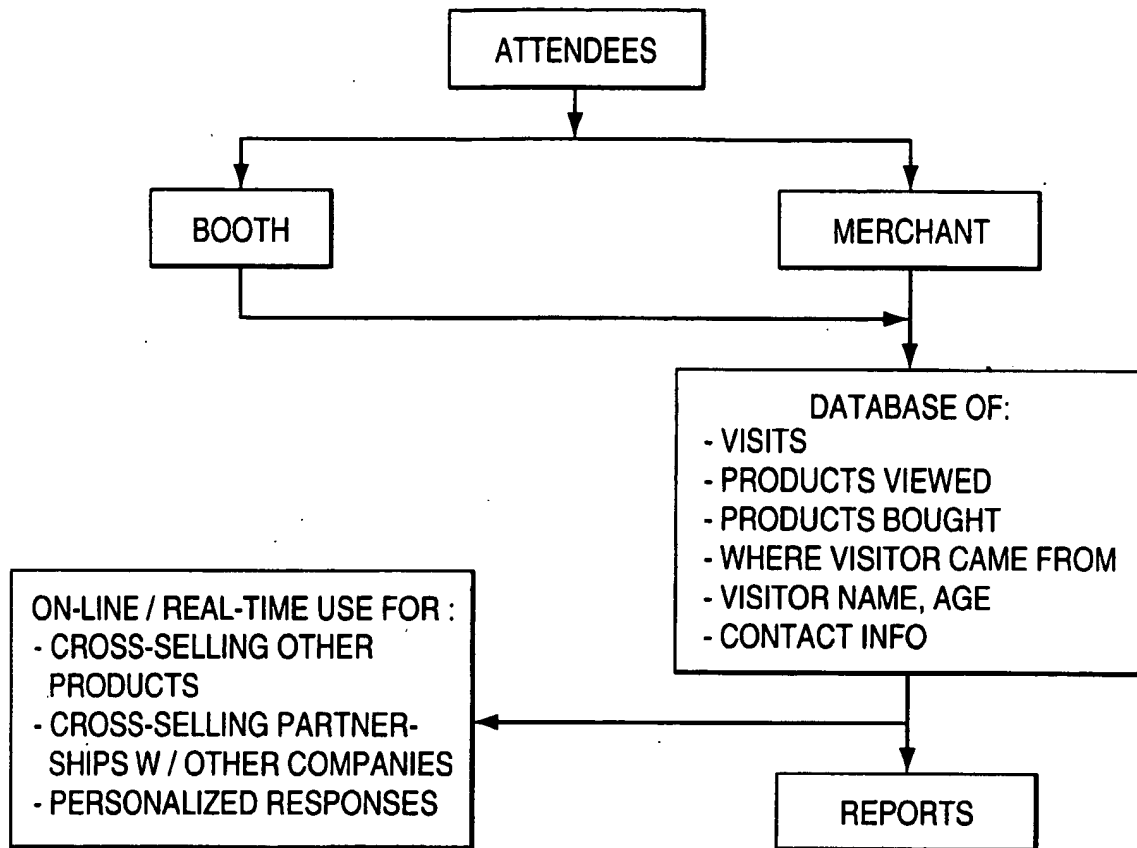
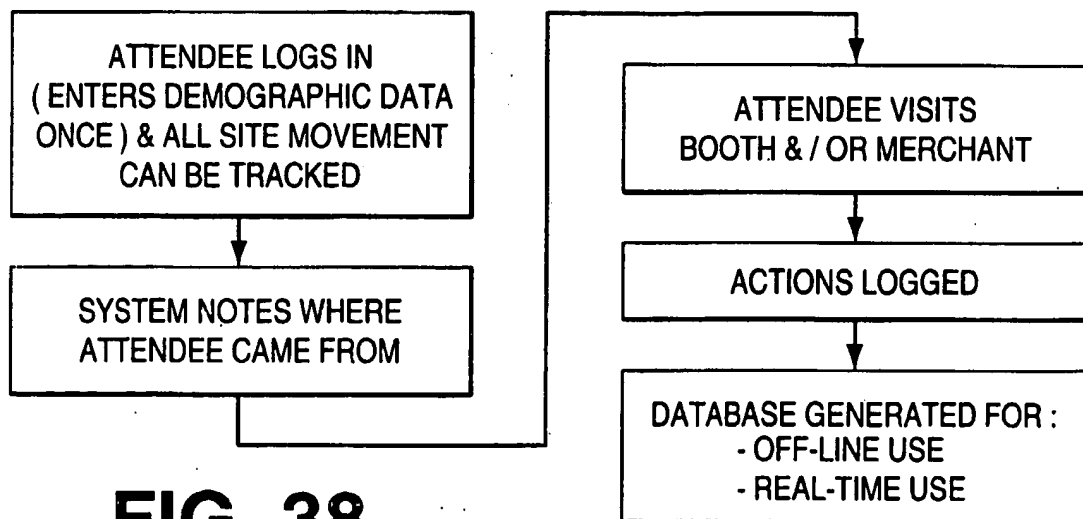
COMPANY / LOCATION / PRODUCT LOCATOR BLOCK DIAGRAM**FIG 32**PRODUCT LOCATOR FLOW CHART**FIG 33**

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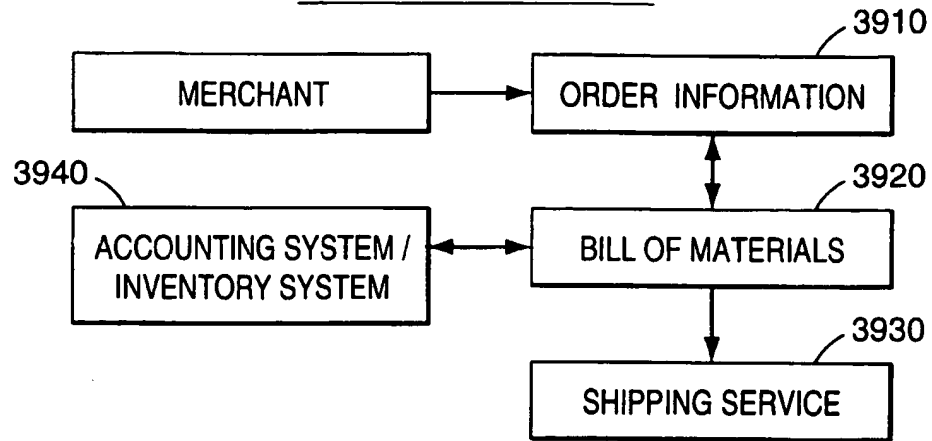
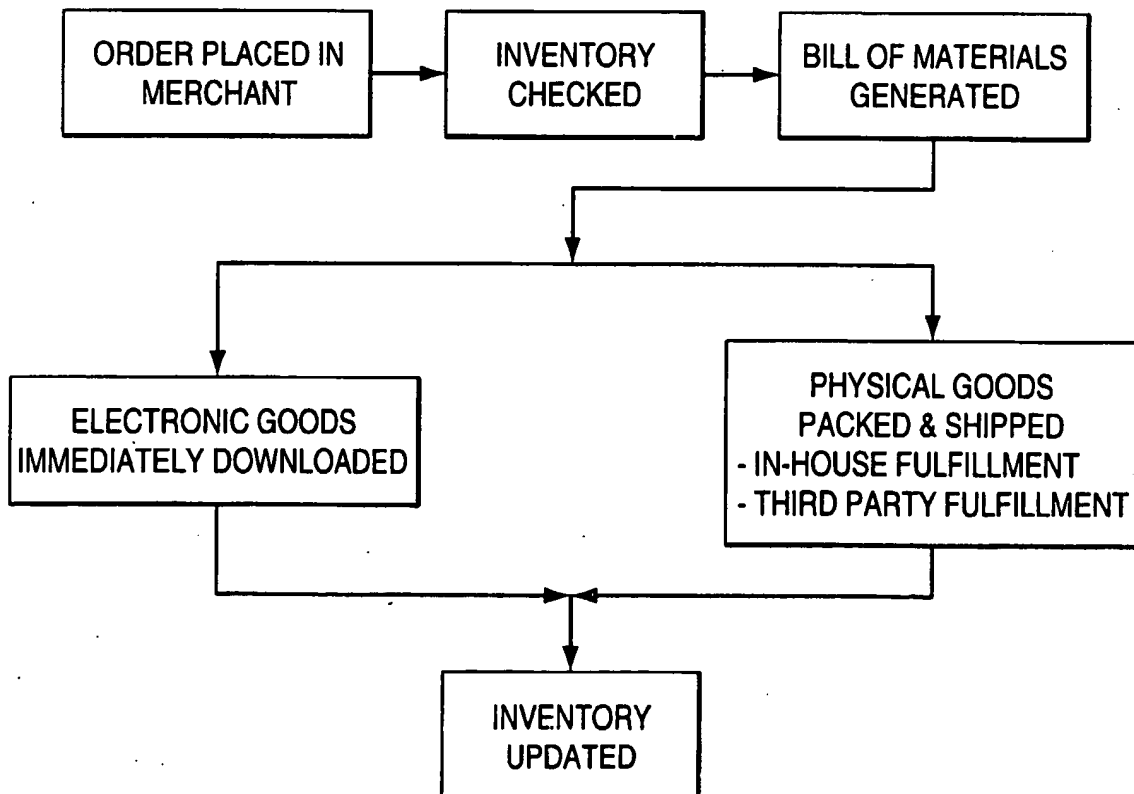
CARE CUSTOMER SERVICE**FIG 34**

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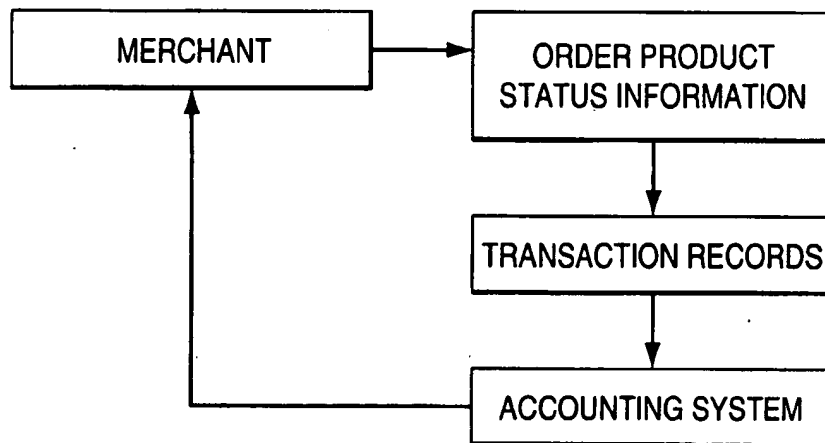
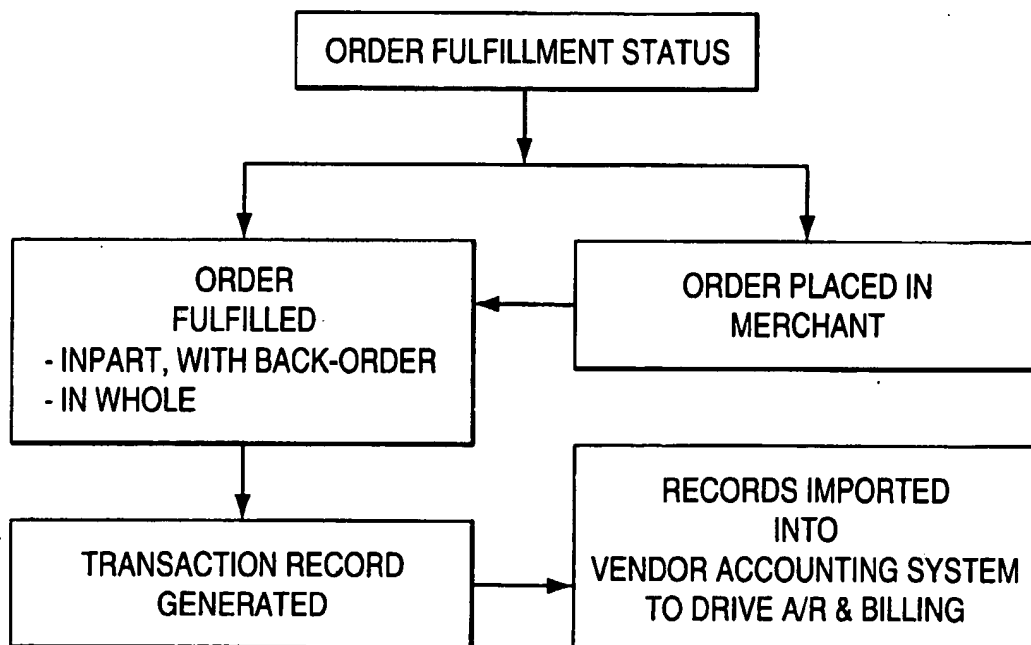
LEAD MANAGEMENT BLOCK DIAGRAM**FIG 35**LEAD MANAGEMENT FLOW CHART**FIG 36**

33 / 41**ATTENDEE DATA DEMOGRAPHICS BLOCK DIAGRAM****FIG 37****ATTENDEE DATA DEMOGRAPHICS FLOW CHART****FIG 38**

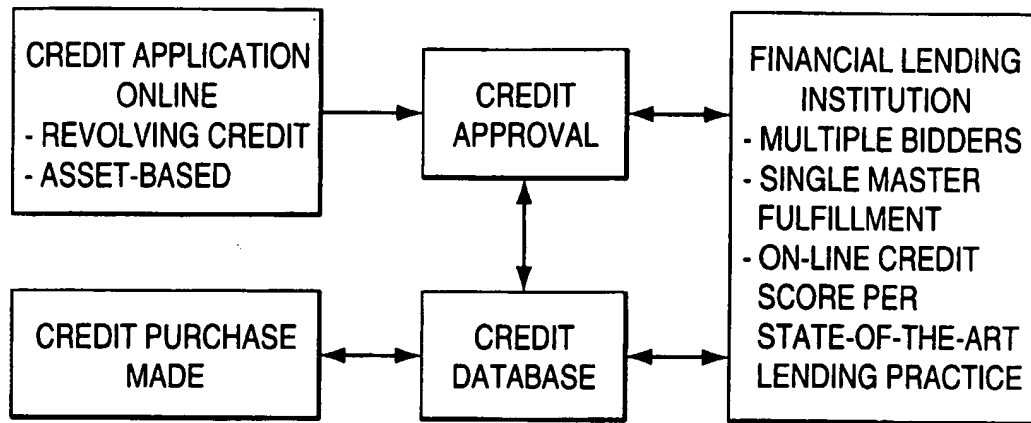
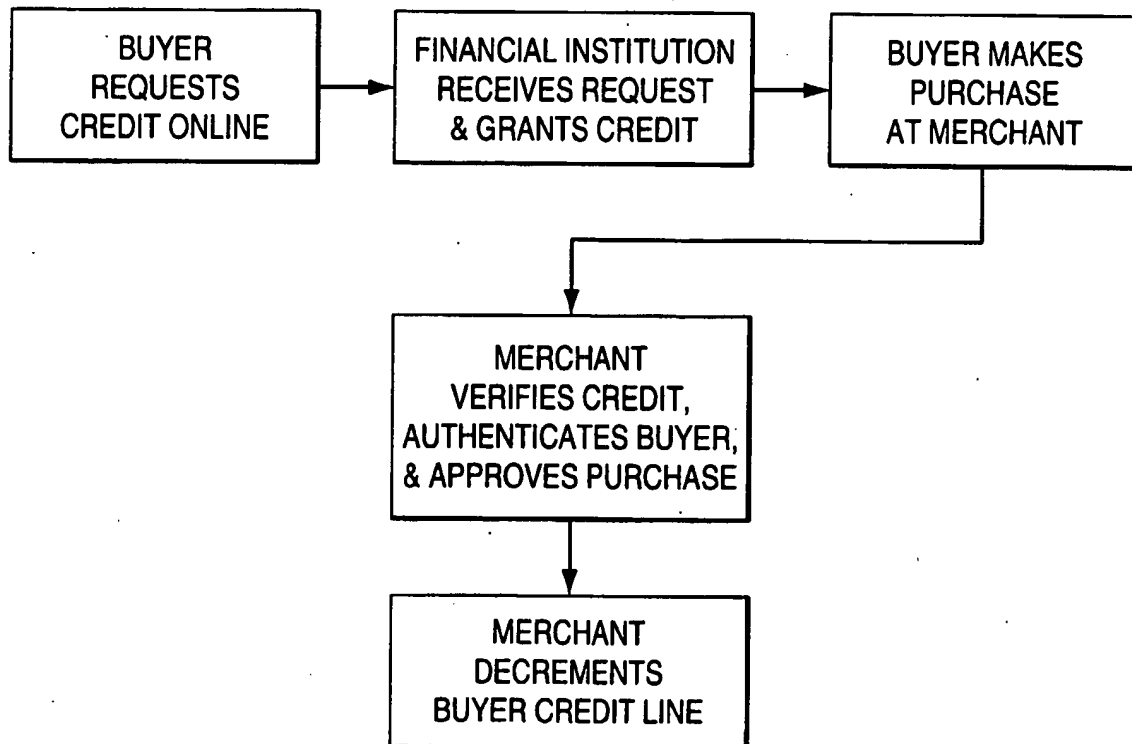
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LOGISTICS FLOW CHART**FIG 39**LOGISTICS BLOCK DIAGRAM**FIG 40**

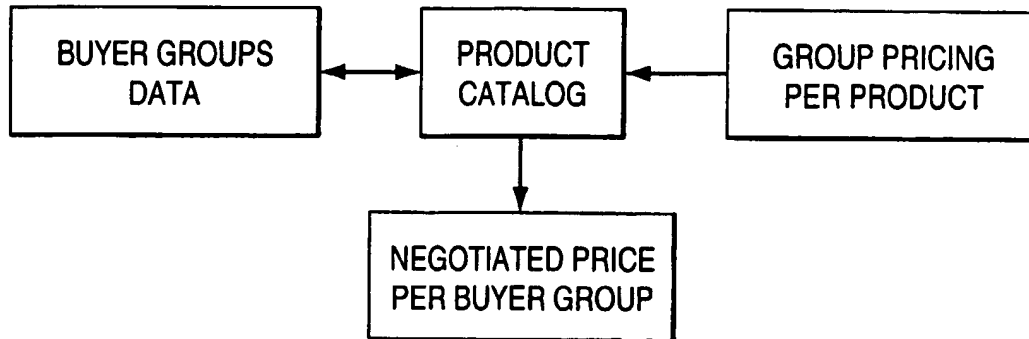
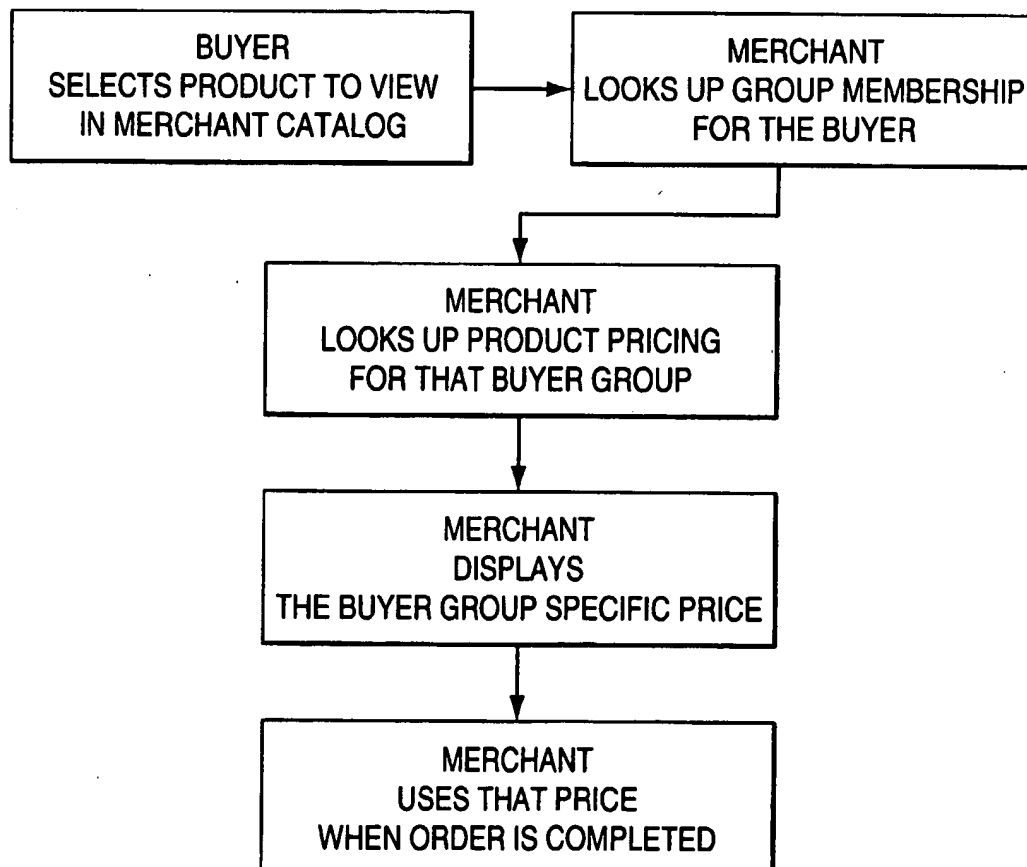
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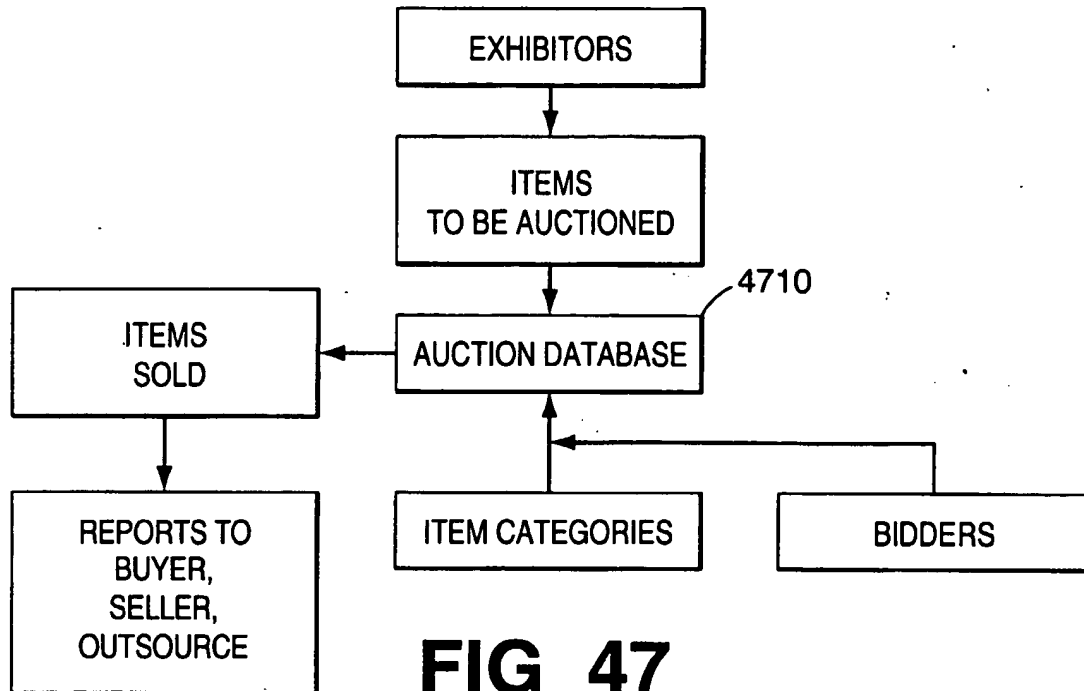
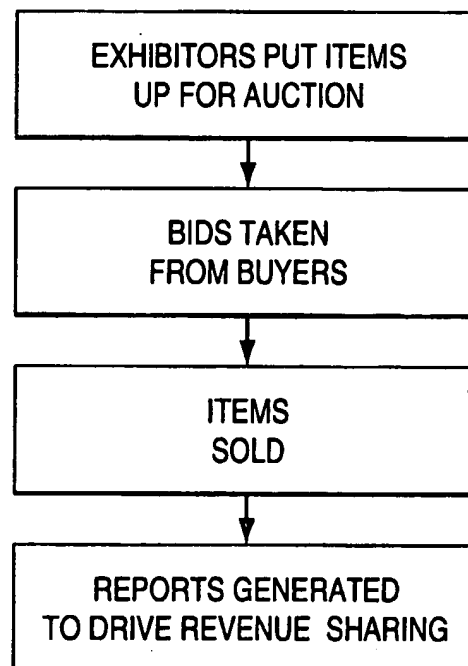
ACCOUNTING INTERFACE BLOCK DIAGRAM**FIG 41**ACCOUNTING INTERFACE FLOW CHART**FIG 42**

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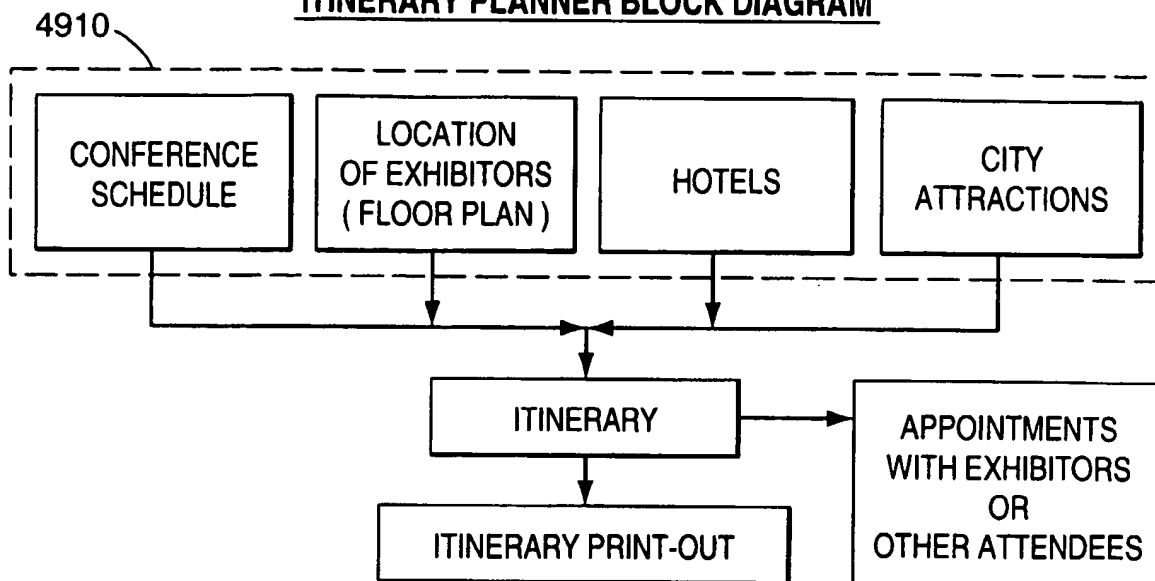
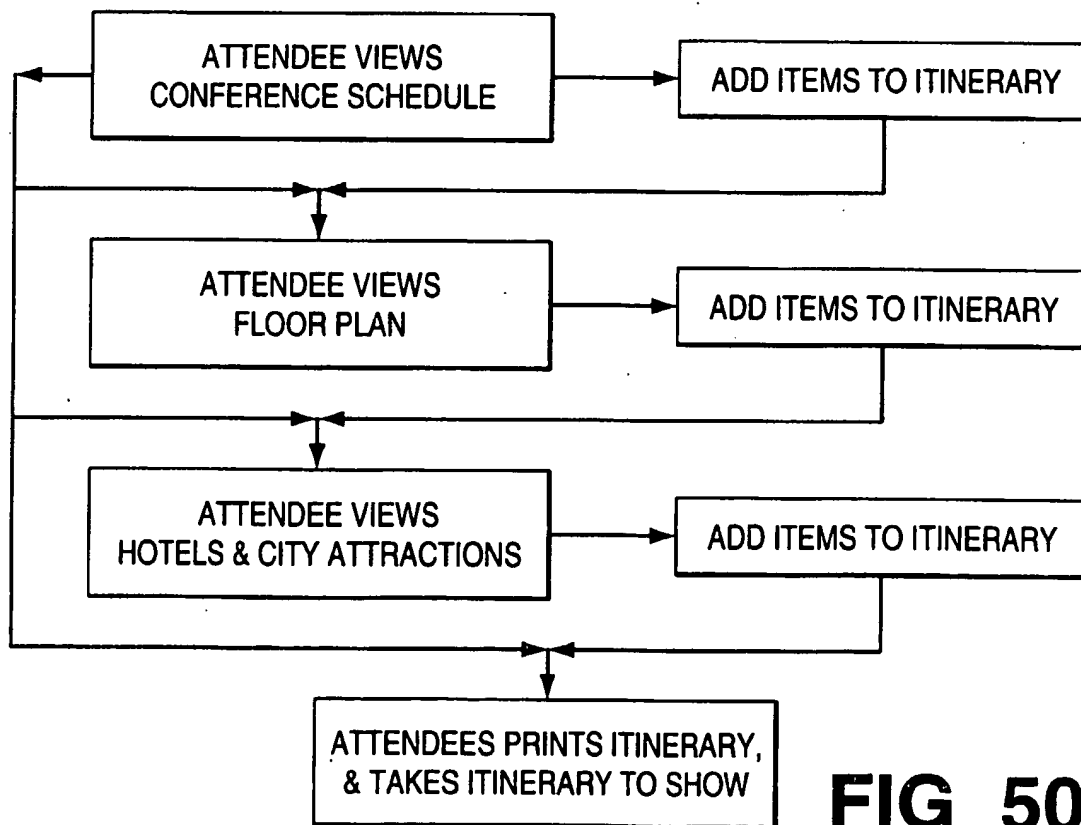
CREDIT BLOCK DIAGRAM**FIG 43**CREDIT FLOW CHART**FIG 44**

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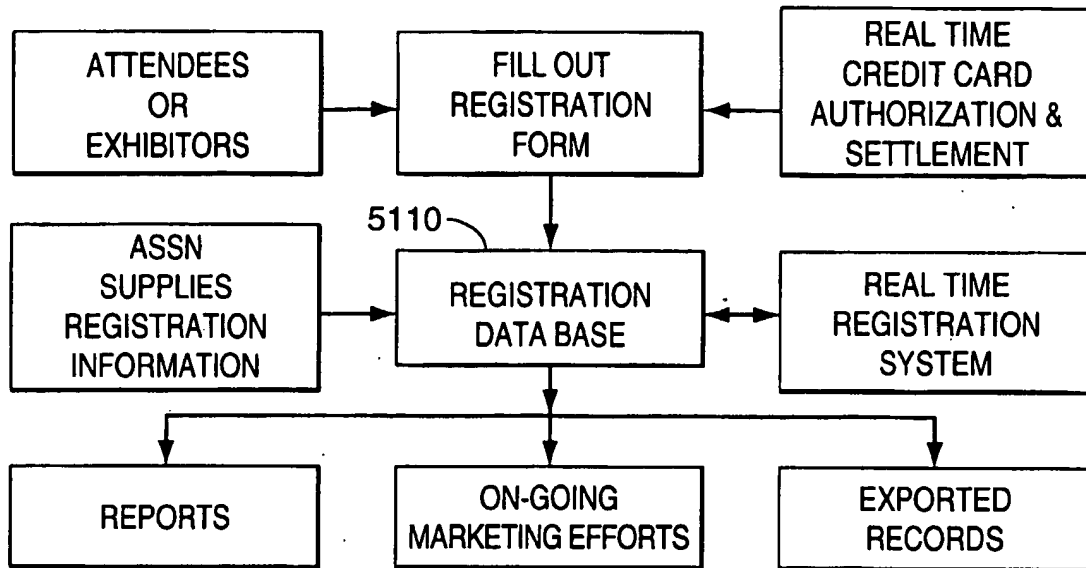
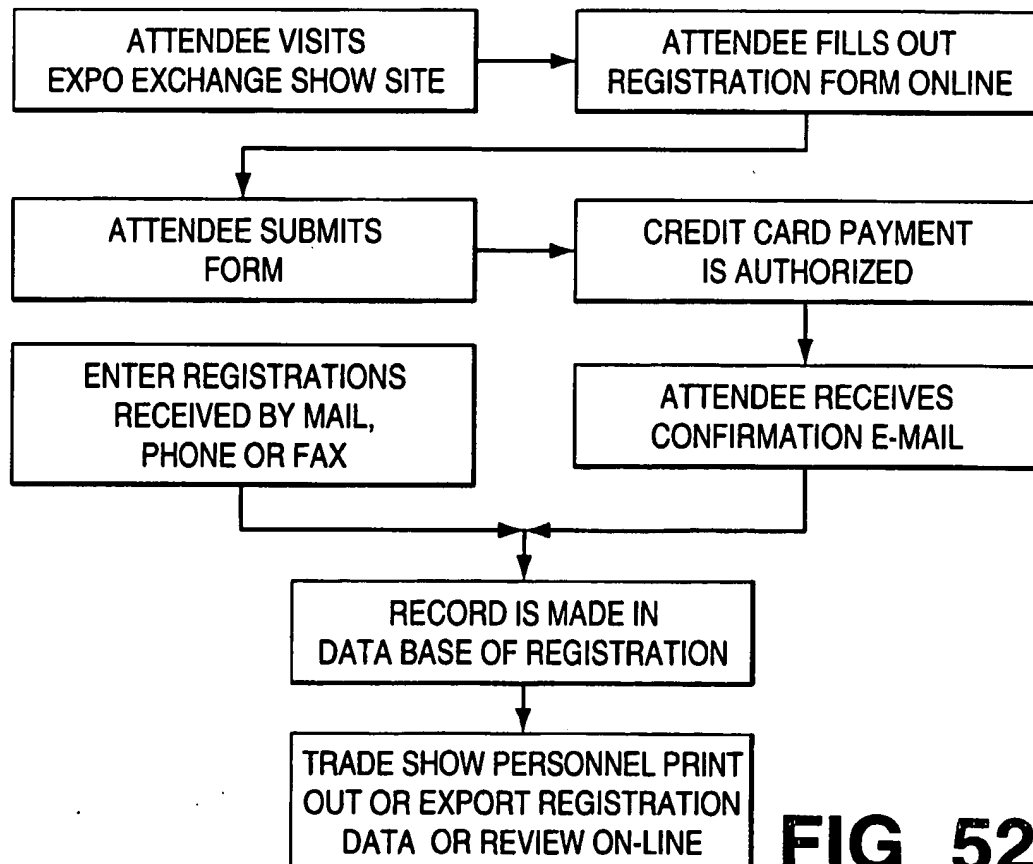
CUSTOM PRICING BLOCK DIAGRAM**FIG 45**CUSTOM PRICING FLOW CHART**FIG 46**

38 / 41**AUCTION BLOCK DIAGRAM****FIG 47****AUCTION FLOW CHART****FIG 48**

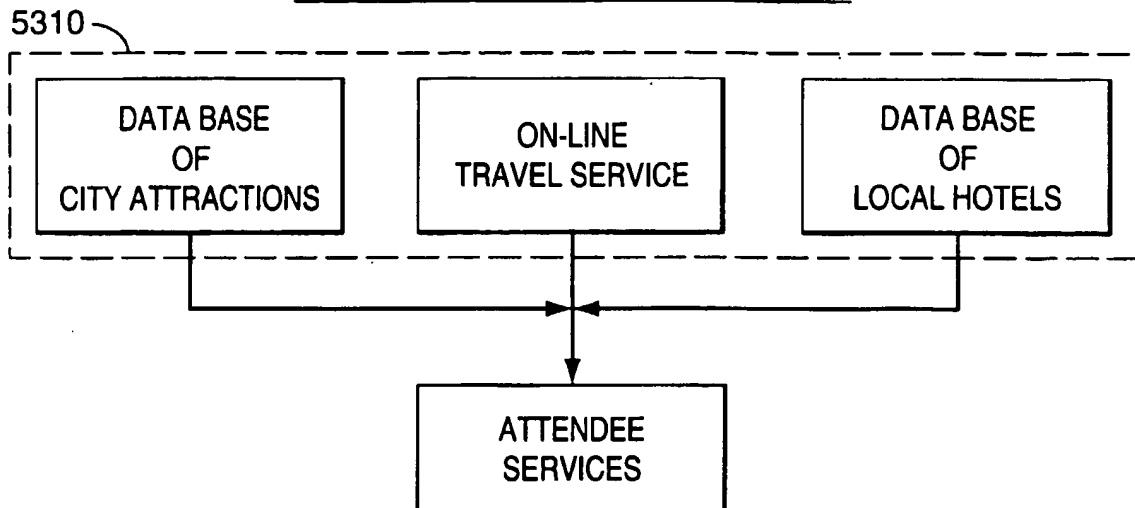
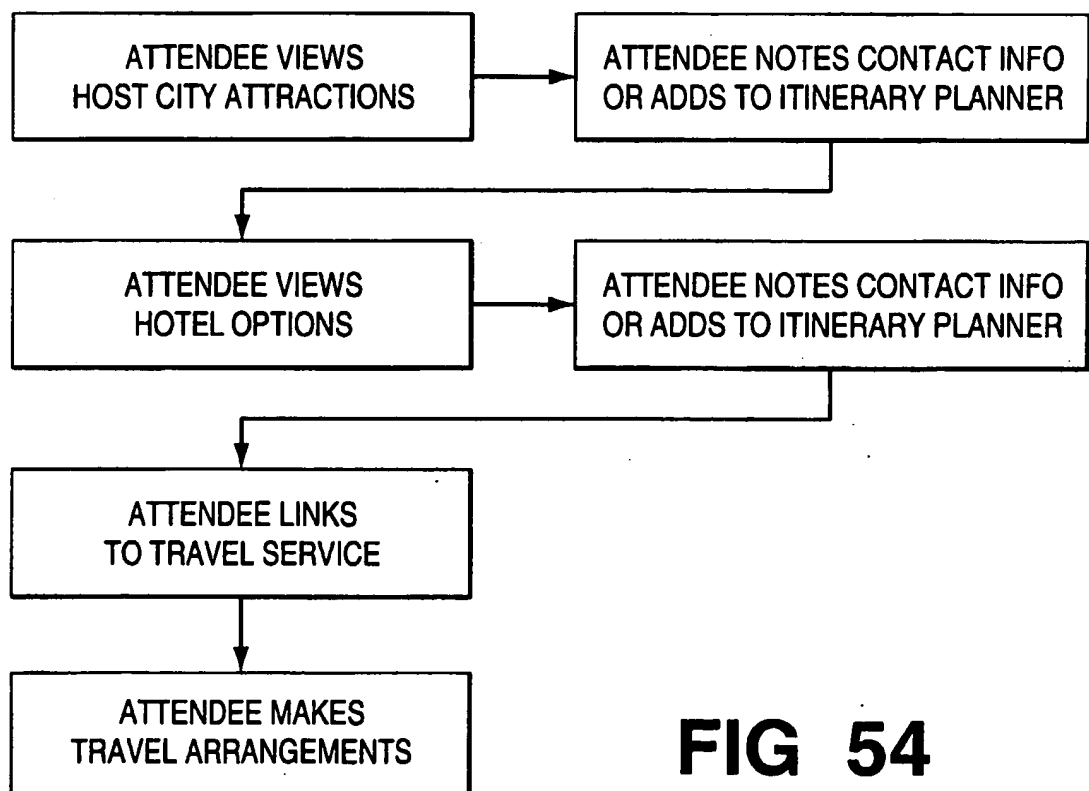
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ITINERARY PLANNER BLOCK DIAGRAM**FIG 49**ITINERARY PLANNER FLOW CHART**FIG 50**

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ONLINE REGISTRATION BLOCK DIAGRAM**FIG 51**ONLINE REGISTRATION FLOW CHART**FIG 52**

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HOST CITY / TRAVEL BLOCK DIAGRAM**FIG 53**HOST CITY / TRAVEL FLOW CHART**FIG 54**